From Advent to Advent

L. BUCHHEIMER

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From Advent to Advent

Sermons on Free Texts

by the

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First Sunday in Advent.

Therefore, thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a Stone, a tried Stone, a precious Corner-stone, a sure Foundation.
Is. 28, 16.

The church-bells, ringing forth their metallic invitation in full and sonorous strains; the organ, reverberating in joyous melody through our sanctuary; the hymns sung in stirring response by the congregation, and the Scripture-lessons and prayers read at the altar — all give articulation to the fact that a festive event has been ushered in. What is the meaning? Advent, we say, has come, and what does that signify? The word Advent means coming, the coming of Christ. Three comings of Christ do we distinguish. The first was the gladsome event to which we are beginning to look forward with holiday cheer, Christ's incarnation, when the Son of God became man, was born a humble infant, and dwelt among us for the space of thirty-three years, sacrificing Himself at its close for the redemption of a fallen world on Calvary's mount.

The second Advent, or coming, is that which will take place when in great majesty and glory Christ shall appear at the end of this world; all nations shall be gathered before Him, and He shall mete out to every one judgment according to what he has done in the body, whether it be good or bad.

But besides these two personal or visible comings, the one past, the other still future, the Church speaks of a third, a present or spiritual coming, *viz.,* His coming into the souls of men, His knocking at the door of their hearts for admission, His offering them His grace and pardon — those blessings which He by His work and sufferings has obtained for them. In this sense He comes to us in every faithful sermon preached, in every service of the Church, in every presentation of His Gospel and Sacrament.

It is this Advent, Christ's spiritual coming, calculated to set before us the blessings of His kingdom upon earth through His Word and Sacrament, that marks the significance of this day. It is the first, the introductory, service of the opening church-year. And how shall we enter upon it? The appointed Scripture-lesson, telling us of our Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem, rings out the joyous note: "Behold, thy King cometh unto thee!" And it is expected of His faithful followers to-day that they accord Him

a like reception as on that memorable occasion when, as we read, "His Zion strewed before Him green boughs and fairest palms" and made the hillside echo with the gladsome acclamation: "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord." And so would we now adore Him with cordial song and psalms: —

> Our hearts shall bloom forever
> For Him with praises new
> And from His name shall never
> Withhold the honor due.

It is in accord with these sentiments and the spirit of the day, as a remembrance of what Christ's spiritual Advent means to us, that, for once, our text has been chosen for further and devout reflection. Reverently addressing ourselves to it, let us, under the direction of that good Spirit who guides us into all truth, and whose presence we also invoke with the incoming church-year, observe three things: —

1. *That man needs a foundation on which to rest.*
2. *Such a foundation is laid for him in Zion.*
3. *It is the duty and the privilege of all to build on this foundation.*

1.

Man needs a foundation on which to rest. On this we need not extensively dwell. We need only regard his nature, his circumstances, and the prospects before him. For what is man? We read in the opening chapter of Genesis: "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." And that is what man essentially is, a living soul, the possessor of an immortal, undying, everlasting spirit. Frail in bodily frame, weak and perishable as to his physical organism, yet does he carry within it that which shall survive the dissolution of the body and have no end.

Again, what is man? Man — he can no more deny it than deny his existence — is a sinner. That is the sad condition of every one of us before God. We are all by nature children of wrath, fallen, guilty transgressors of God's holy, immutable Law.

Once again, what is man? Man is an accountable being. He must once stand before the throne of rigid and righteous Justice and answer for the deeds done in the body and receive a sentence from that final tribunal which will decide his condition

for eternity. And when we come to look at his circumstances, the situation in which he is placed, how is it with us? We live in a changing, transient world; the scenes that engross us to-day are passed, well-nigh forgotten on the morrow; the dearest and most valued of our possessions and loves are but as a vapor, which appears for a little while and then vanishes away. A few years, even if life be spared, of which we have no certainty, those in youth shall have advanced forward into middle life, and those in middle life shall have passed into the place of the aged, and the aged, in turn, passed into the great company of the dead. And meanwhile, passing through these successive periods, what sorrows around our path; what sickness, what disappointments and griefs to weigh down our spirits, and at life's journey's end — the silence and the gloom, the solemnity of the dying hour, the passing down into the dark and shadowy vale that leads across to the Great Beyond.

People may not now think of these scenes that are before them; they may neglect to prepare for them; they may put them quite out of mind and live as if they were mere matters of fiction; and yet, no human being, be he young or old, be he believer or infidel, be his character and condition in life what they may, because he is a creature of God, the consciousness still alive in him that there dwells within the spirit of God once breathed into his nostrils; in spite of his denials and his frivolity a monitor, called conscience, rises up against him and convicts him of offenses against the majesty of God, convincing him that he is guilty, an undone sinner, who before God has nothing to offer in palliation or justification, and that, when he draws this fleeting breath, when his eyelids close in death, he must soar to worlds unknown, face his God before His throne. It is these considerations that will force upon every one — unless he be as stupid as a brute and senseless as a stone — the conviction of the necessity of a foundation to rest upon, the desire to have some one who will speak peace to his agitated conscience, who can sustain and comfort amid the circumstances of life, hold him up amid its closing scenes and on that great day of final reckoning.

2.

Yes, frail, fallen, and dependent man needs a foundation on which to rest. That is the first proposition, and the second is that such a foundation is laid for us in Zion. Our text reads: "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a Stone, a tried Stone, a precious Corner-stone, a sure Foundation." This is figurative language,

but there can be no question who is meant. "Other foundation," says the apostle, "can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

In contemplating this Foundation, several qualifications are given which claim our special attention. In the first place, our text speaks of a stone. "I lay in Zion for a foundation a Stone." A stone stands for solidity and durability, and such is Christ. He is the same yesterday and to-day and forever. Everything else is changeable. Nothing is permanent. We look over the history of our human race, — the mightiest governments, the most powerful empires that the ingenuity of man has reared, — where are they to-day: Assyria and Egypt and Tyre; Media, Persia, Greece? Yes, many are entirely forgotten; others are a mere ghost of their former greatness. Have not we ourselves seen one such stupendous nation crushed in recent years, its standard-bearers fall, and its glory departed? And so it is with all else of man's make and dependence — wealth, honor, pleasure. What a foundation for an immortal soul to build upon! A mere bubble, a shadow, an empty breath, delusion, and dream. Not so with this Rock. It is not constructed of the perishable material of this world's creation. It is divine in its nature; it is the Rock of Ages, and so it crumbles not with the passing away of terrestrial scenes. And not only is it a stone, this foundation of which our text speaks, solid and enduring; it is a tried stone, one that has been tested and not found wanting. To us an illustration: —

Near the southwestern extremity of Great Britain, there stands upon an isolated rock, miles from the shore, a tall and massive column of solid masonry. That structure is the world-renowned Eddystone Lighthouse. Its story is instructive. When, over one hundred years ago, its architect proposed to erect on that storm-lashed rock a lofty beacon to warn the mariner of the dangerous cliffs beyond, there were those who laughed to scorn the enterprise as the dream of a visionary and enthusiast. No structure could withstand the dreadful tempests that visited those shores. After three years of many reverses the last stone was laid, and the saving beacon-light shed its rays over the troubled waters. "Wait," was the prediction, "till one of those violent hurricanes arises, such as occur only three or four times in a century, and see." It did arise, and it will never be forgotten by those who witnessed it. The people on shore trembled for the fate of the keeper of the light-house, and with breaking day directed their telescopes through the

dark and murky air to see whether any vestige of the structure could be discerned, when — what astonishment! — there it stood, still rearing its summit to the clouds, perfectly uninjured, not a stone displaced; and it has stood there ever since, bidding defiance to the rage of the elements.

So it is with Christ and the kingdom which he has founded upon earth. Time fails me to tell of the storms, the storms of persecution, hatred, and malice, that during these nineteen centuries have beaten upon this Rock — storms from pagans, storms from papists, storms from infidels, storms from false friends and deceivers. Yet that Rock stands unshaken, its energies unbroken. As we sing: —

> On the Rock of Ages founded,
> What can shake thy sure repose?
> With salvation's walls surrounded,
> Thou may'st smile at all thy foes.

It is a tried Stone.

Again, a precious Corner-stone. That indicates another characteristic. The principal weight of an edifice rests on the corners; hence, in building, the largest and firmest blocks are selected and placed there. Take away such stones from the material building in which we are now assembled, and even a child can understand that the whole structure must fall. And thus it is with the Church and the entire Christian system. The Lord Jesus Christ, in all the preciousness (for Scripture calls Him a precious Corner-stone) of His essential Godhead, in all the preciousness of His vicarious atonement, His meritorious obedience and suffering, is the Corner-stone, the Foundation, upon which all the hopes of every individual believer, and of the Church collectively, rest. He sustains the whole temple. Without Him the Christian faith would totter and fall to pieces in one mass of indistinguishable ruins. Summing up the whole, our text says: "a sure Foundation." It is that, no matter from what angle you regard it.

In proof we need only ask those who built upon it. Paul, firmly standing upon this Foundation, with death staring him in the face, exclaims: "I know in whom I have believed." Martin Luther, when asked, "Reverend Father, are you ready to die steadfast in Christ and His doctrine as you have proclaimed it?" answers distinctly, "Yes," and then prays: "Into Thy hands I commend my spirit. Thou hast redeemed me, Thou faithful God." And if we could draw aside the veil that separates us from

the multitudes of the redeemed in glory and inquire of them: "What was the foundation upon which you built, the Rock in which you trusted, while traveling in this vale of tears below?" from Abel, the first to reach those blissful regions on high, to the last that has entered the glorious abode, would come in lofty, unanimous testimony: "None but He! None but He! Resting upon Him, we now bear the palm of triumph and sing the songs of victory."

3.

Such is the Foundation. To build upon it is the duty and the privilege of all. Where is this Foundation? Not in some distant place, difficult of access. Reads the text: "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a Stone." In the Church, accordingly, is this Foundation, with its instructions, promises, and ordinances. It is well for us to emphasize this. Many think little or nothing of the Church. They contend that we can be just as good and hopeful Christians outside of the Church as in it, without its instructions, promises, and ordinances as with them. They would place the Cornerstone of a Christian's faith and hope in a different place than where God in His infinite wisdom has placed it.

We shall not at this time enter upon the question whether God outside of, apart from, the external, visible Church may save a person; we shall not even dispute it. But that such an admission should be made a plea to degrade God's plan and place of salvation, to belittle His Church, and offered as an excuse for standing aloof from identification with it, is presumption, headiness, rebellion, setting oneself up against the stipulation that God has made when He declares: "Behold, I lay in Zion a Foundation"; and so it is not for man to argue and to seek other places. It is not right Christianity, if, indeed, Christianity at all.

And what does it mean to build upon this Foundation? It means, first of all, that you feel, as we pointed out in the course of our sermon, the need of just such a Foundation, and that you make use of the means which God Himself has instituted in Zion with which to build up this foundation. Those means of building upon this foundation are twofold; they are the preaching of His Word and the administering of His Sacrament, so on this, the first Sunday of the church-year, He comes again in His infinite mercy and beseeches us graciously to listen to His messages, and diligently, for our spiritual welfare, to use His Sacrament. And we should not?

Daughter of Zion, Congregation of God, thus rings out the proclamation of the great seer: "Behold, thy King cometh unto thee!" He stands at the door, seeking admission. What will you do? Let Him in! Let Him into the pulpit with His saving Word, blessing the minister and the message he proclaims. Let Him into the baptismal font, that the souls of many infants may be regenerated by the washing of the life-giving water sprinkled upon their brows. Admit Him to the altar with the sacred elements of His divine body and blood, dispensed for the forgiveness of sins; for where there is forgiveness of sin, there is life and salvation. God grant that this consecrated space may be thronged on each occasion with souls hungering and thirsting after righteousness. Let Him into the pews with His Spirit and grace, that those who are seated there — and may they come from a sincere motive — may be instructed, built up in the faith, comforted, fitted for Christian duty, and prepared for the life to come.

Yes, Lord, come in! Take possession of Thy sanctuary, take possession of our hearts, and help us to build more devotedly, more securely upon the stone which Thou hast laid for a foundation in Zion. We will trust in Thee, for Thou hast promised that we shall never be confounded. Hallelujah! Amen.

Second Sunday in Advent.

Of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but My Father only. But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days that were before the Flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and knew not until the Flood came and took them away, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be. — *Matt. 24, 36—39.*

Two most terrific and overwhelming calamities does the text call to our minds. One of these is past, the other is yet to come. The time was when the earth was wrapped as in swaddling-bands of waters; it is yet to be enveloped in sheets of flaming fire. Thus reads the word of the Lord: "The world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished. But the heavens and the earth which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the Day of Judgment and perdition of ungodly men. . . . But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also and the works

that are therein shall be burned up." 2 Pet. 3, 6. 7. 10. It is of that future event that we would speak, restricting ourselves to a few of the most prominent truths; and it verily is a subject which should enlist our most reverent and solemn attention. If God should whisper into the ear of every man who is here to-day that he and the present generation shall witness the scenes of that Great Day ere death comes upon him, what wakeful vigilance he would show, what trembling anxiety, what untiring efforts to be ready! How every novel sign in the heavens above and the earth beneath, every flash of lightning, every peal of thunder, every rush of the stormy elements, and every quivering of the ground would be observed in expectancy! But does not God in His Word reveal to us that such may be the case, that, for all we know, that day may be upon us before the rise of another day's sun? Should, then, the subject not find us widely alert, anxious to hear and learn all that we possibly can in respect to it and then to consider what ought to be the practical effects of it upon our conduct and life? In view of this let us attend to the lines of Scripture just read to you.

1.

The first particular we are informed of is that the *time* of the Savior's second coming is involved in secrecy. There are many things regarding the future which God's Word tells us of; this does not belong to them. It is a mystery most profound. There have always been, and doubtless always will be, would-be prophets, who, putting their finger upon some Scripture-passage, contend that the prophecy referred to has been fulfilled, or, placing their ear to the earth and imagining that they are hearing the sound of the Messiah's on-rolling chariot, venture a prediction as to the exact time when Judgment Day will come. We had plenty of such during the past years, during the world's gigantic conflict. But they were all put to shame, as will be done with all others who seek to pry into the secret things belonging to the Lord, our God. "Of that day and hour knoweth no man," says the text, nor should we presume to know; it is beyond the knowledge of man; even the angels, those heavenly watchers, share in our ignorance. Nor shall it be revealed to us until an astonished universe will hear the sound of the trumpet and the eyes of all men will see the sign of the Son of Man flashing forth in the skies. Moreover, we ask, Why should we know? What value would it have? To gratify the curiosity of man? That is not what the Bible has been given

us for. In fact, I know not what more decisively proves the divine inspiration — the pure and full information it gives on all that is essential or the deep, wonderful silence it maintains on everything that merely gratifies an itching and worthless curiosity. Suppose that the exact day and hour had been made known, is there any proof that the masses of mankind would believe it any more than they are persuaded to believe the Gospel? They would regard it with the same indifference and unbelief that they do the other divinely attested truths of this Volume. Yes, it would do incalculable mischief. What was the effect upon Jerusalem? When the people were warned that the plowshares of the Romans would soon overturn their ancient city and their magnificent Temple, they indulged in all sorts of intoxication, excess, and crime. It is expedient for us not to know the day and the hour.

However, though distinctly informed that the exact chronology of the advent of our blessed Lord is known to none, we are also told that there are certain significant signs, phenomena, and historical occurrences which foretell its nearness, and to which we are to attend. No physician upon earth can specify the exact hour or moment of a dying man's death; however, he does know by his pulse, from certain signs and symptoms, from the ascertained nature of the disease, whether the day of death is comparatively near or remote, so that he will be able with remarkable accuracy to predict that he cannot live beyond so many days or so many weeks. So we may be, and positively are, unable to specify the day or the hour when this dispensation will end; but we may feel nature's faltering, hesitating pulse; we may detect symptoms of exhaustion in all things above and around and below and thus, with God's inspired Chart in our hands, calculate approximately whether this is Friday or Saturday of the world's long week. And such study is not without profit. The Lord censured the men of His day because they could predict wet weather and fine weather from the sky at evening and at noon and did not regard the moral signs of the age in which they lived. The Scripture, too, is most explicit in giving us tokens and signs by which we are to infer whether that final event is near or remote. One such sign is that given here when the Lord says: "As the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be." We naturally ask, "How was it in the days of Noah?" Let our minds carry us back over four thousand years. Upon a plain you find a man building a vessel 450 feet long, 75 feet high, and 60 feet wide. You inquire,

"Sir, do you not labor in vain? How can your vessel ever be launched? It is so large, and we are far from the sea." He answers: "I expect the water to overflow this plain and bear the vessel up." "But why expect that? Has such a thing ever been heard of?" "No, but God said it shall come to pass." "Others do not believe it." "True, but their unbelief does not make the threatening of God of none effect; it rather increases their guilt." "Dismiss your fears; God is too merciful to destroy His creatures; He will not drown the world and all that has breath therein, as you contend. You have an exaggerated conception." Yes, I do not doubt that the scientific men of that day contended that there was not enough water in the ocean to cover the whole earth, while others criticized the novel architecture and sympathetically pointed to their brows; perhaps things were not altogether normal there. And it was only when the windows of heaven were opened and poured down their roaring cataracts, and the great ocean, agitated by some subterranean earthquakes, threw up its waters to the very tops of the mountains, that the antediluvian who had laughed at the fanatic for his prophecy began to realize that the supposed fanatic was right, and he who had despised the message of this preacher of righteousness and defied the word and the judgments of heaven plead piteously to be received into the peculiar boat-house as it rose in safety. "So shall it be when the Son of Man cometh." Thousands will be just as incredulous. There will be the scoffers, says the Apostle Peter, jeering at Bible predictions and reckoning it as absurd and impossible that the world should be burned up with fire, as the people before the Deluge considered it absurd that it should perish with water. A foolish dream! A pious delusion, a superstitious bugaboo to scare people into religion! Yes, even those who do not go to that extreme regard it as a matter of high-strung speculation, bordering on the improbable. But their unbelief and doubts shall not stay the fulfilling of the prophecies of God. The Lord is not slack concerning His promises, as some count slackness. The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night. How these scoffers and skeptics will look up when the divine reality will suddenly burst upon them! Regret for their unbelief will then be too late.

2.

Again, what sort of days were they at the time of Noah? Our text says: "For as in the days that were before the Flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage."

This is not stated as though eating and drinking, as well as marrying and giving in marriage were sinful actions; they are not; on the contrary, it is in obedience to a divine command that this is done. Where, then, lay the sin? In this: These things were their all; they had no use or no time for anything else; their minds, their hearts, their schemes, centered in them. And in their materialistic, wanton, lascivious, bestialized wickedness they scorned the remonstrances and predictions of a righteous Noah who sought to bring them to a better mind and course. So shall it be at the last Great Day, when the Son of God shall come to judge the world. Men will, in like manner, be swallowed up in the objects and scenes, the schemes and pursuits, the clamor and indulgences, of sensual and earthly things. These things, seen and temporal, will shut their minds and hearts against the spiritual interests of the soul and of eternity. How true, with each advancing year, is the old hymn, to quote it in full: —

God hath His blessed Gospel given
To fit our needy souls for heaven,
But most the precious treasure spurn
Nor care its saving truth to learn.

True search for the pure Word of God
By greed and lust for earthly good
Is overborne, and yet men say
Danger and doom are far away.

Inventions daily multiply
Ungodliness to deify
And by mere human might to seize
Whate'er may bless, whate'er may please.

The Christian name is greatly praised,
Yet few to pious lives are raised.
In truth, God's laws are all defied,
And man exults in godless pride.

Where now can brother's love be found?
All lands with robbery abound.
There is no faithfulness, no faith;
"Give me but money," each one saith.

But their indulgence will not stay; rather it will hasten on the coming of that final catastrophe. While some will be casting up the mighty sums of their treasures on earth, expanding and improving their schemes for the increase of gain, and some will be wallowing, as swine in their sties, in the abominable pollutions of sensual lusts and intoxicating drink and gliding, like butterflies,

through scenes of revelry, dance, and theatrical shows, in deep forgetfulness of the eternal future, the earth will suddenly begin to heave and rock, fires irrepressible will begin to blaze out from one part of heaven to another, concentrated peals of rattling thunder will break in one dread crash from pole to pole. The sun will turn to darkness, the moon to blood, stones will fall from on high like shriveled fig-leaves, and the heavens themselves will pass away with a great noise, whilst, heralded by the archangel's trumpet, the Judge will come on the clouds of heaven in the glory of ten thousand suns and attended by ten thousand times ten thousands of thousands of angels, strong in might and swift in obedience, to gather all of Adam's race to His tribunal. This is most certainly true.

3.

What, in view of this solemn and most positive truth, ought to be our attitude? For what reason did the Son of God direct attention to these tremendous events of the future? "Be ye ready; for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh." When are we in a state of readiness? Heb. 11, 7 we read: "By faith Noah . . . prepared an ark to the *saving* of his house." We, too, have an ark in which we can be saved. You know what it is. In the midst of a world of sin and depravity, upon which God has pronounced His righteous judgments as clearly as upon the race in Noah's day, it stands, the great, capacious Gospel Ark, a refuge of safety. Come whatever Jehovah may commission upon our guilty world, it is certain to ride safely above the tumultuous tempest and bring us to the celestial mountain, the Ararat of heaven.

When we reflect that Christ is coming for the purpose of associating us with Himself, as a bride with her husband, that life enjoyed hereafter is life here begun by faith and connected with the Gospel and the Sacraments, then it is one of the most essential things for us to have fellowship with Him here, in the holy rites of His Church, where alone men can learn to love, worship, and adore Him so as to be happy in His company. Be found there. When fire and brimstone came upon Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot had his Zoar. When Jerusalem sank in fire and ashes, the Christians had their Pella, a place of safety. So let us fly to the shelter of the cross and find salvation there. The matter stands with you, dear hearers. Give it your most earnest attention; it means an eternity of either weal or woe; the gracious invitation: "Come,

ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world," or: "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." Which shall it be? May we all here met be found in Christ and His Gospel Ark to the salvation of our souls! Amen.

Third Sunday in Advent.

He answered and said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, "Make straight the way of the Lord," as said the prophet Esaias.
John 1, 23.

Upon the platform of our Christian life there steps on this particular Sunday the familiar and heroic figure of John the Baptist. Of extraordinary origin, his birth having been announced by angel lips to his father Zacharias as he was burning incense in the Temple; of extraordinary training, his life having for the most part been spent in the Wilderness of Judea; of extraordinary dress — his garment the shaggy cloth of camels' hair slung over his shoulders and fastened with a leathern girdle about his loins; an extraordinary diet, his food being locusts and wild honey, — he had a most extraordinary mission to fulfil and aroused a most extraordinary commotion in the land of Israel. Upon the banks of the river Jordan, at a point where the Israelites had once passed over into the Holy Land, where in after-years the waters were divided when smitten by the prophet's mantle, and from whose further side Elijah had stepped into the chariot of fire that piloted him to heavenly heights, appeared the stalwart form of a man, some thirty years of age, proclaiming in trumpet tones: "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." His proclamation, like echoing thunder, shook the land, insomuch that "all Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region round about Jordan" poured forth in thronging thousands to hear him; Pharisees and Sadducees, paupers and profligates, all classes and ranks, swarmed out to the solitude of the wilderness to gaze upon, and to listen to, the wonderful stranger and his electrifying message; and ever more and more the impression was gaining ground: "Is not this the Messiah, He that was to come, the Promised One?" One day there waits upon him an official embassy, sent by the leaders from Jerusalem, to receive answer on the question: Art thou the Christ? He of whom Moses and the prophets did write? Nor did he fail to give

them a clear, unmistakable, and emphatic reply. "I am not," he declared, "the Christ." And they asked him, Who then? Art thou Elias, or Enoch, or Moses, or one of the old prophets (who were expected to appear along with the Christ about that time)? And he answered, "No." Then they said to him: "Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself?" To which he responded: "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as said the prophet Esaias."

We cannot but feel the deepest interest in the man. He was the morning star of the New Testament. Upon him our Lord pronounced the highest eulogy He ever uttered with reference to any person. "Among them that are born of women," He affirmed, "there hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptist." Well worthy, then, that we should form a clear conception of who this John the Baptist was, of his relation to Christ and his message. That is what he tells us in the text. May God bless its presentation to your souls!

1.

You will note, to begin with, that, in giving answer, he quotes from the Holy Scriptures: "As said the prophet Esaias," or Isaiah. In that he may serve as a pattern for us. A good and an excellent thing it is to be able to quote from the Bible. To buy a copy of the Holy Volume and to treasure it when bought, to put it upon a table as an ornament to one's house and a proof of one's piety, is good as far as it goes. But the Bible was never intended to be only thus honored. It must be read to be of any service, and be read so as to be remembered. It is just possible that if some of us had been in this man's place, we should have had a little difficulty in making our memory of Scripture serve us. There are so many books nowadays that the Bible is in considerable danger of being forgotten. Not that we object to the reading of modern books; everybody, as far as possible, should know something of the literature of his time; but to allow the Bible to be crowded out by books the best of which have not so much in their whole body as the Bible has in its little finger, is a sign of but little wisdom and of a poor Christianity. "Blessed is the man . . . whose delight is in the Law of the Lord and in His Law doth he meditate day and night"; and sad is his condition who cares not to read the Word of God, or who, reading it, cares not to remember it, or who,

remembering it, is ashamed to quote it when a fitting time is come. Encouraged by John, and as was the custom of our pious fathers, let us properly adorn our speech with the words of Holy Writ and thus show a due appreciation of what place it holds in our thoughts and life. Nor did John the Baptist, by his quotation, leave his hearers in doubt as to what he thought of the Bible. He plainly showed that he accepted it as divinely inspired, that he believed in its every utterance as being of divine origin. And how does he apply its statement to himself? He said: "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness." We know what the voice is. The voice is not the word; the voice is the instrument and organ through which the word receives clear and rightful utterance. And we know what a wilderness is. It is a waste, a desert and desolate country, and such a waste indeed was the Jewish land, morally and spiritually, when John the Baptist appeared. Like our own age, it was an age of transition, great uncertainty, marked by the wreckage of sacred institutions, an age of general and abounding corruption. Everything was being shaken. As the historian says: "There was a callousness of the heart, a petrifying of the moral sense, a restiveness, which even those who suffered from it felt to be portentous and abnormal." We think of the materialism of the Sadducees, the formalism and fanaticism of the Pharisees. Palestine was a moral and a religious wilderness. And in the midst of all this, close to the sea of death, at whose bottom lay the blasted cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, is heard a voice. What does it speak? It had a twofold message. The one was: "Repent ye." What is it to repent? Repentance, according to the Scriptures, means a change of heart and purpose; it means a transformation of the soul, the adoption of new principles, new tastes, new dispositions. Repentance is accompanied by grief over one's past unworthiness, a confession of sin before Almighty God, a turning of a new leaf, a beginning again. And no less was meant by John the Baptist when he invited Israel to repent. Here was the key to the kingdom of heaven, which, he declared, was near at hand; unless opened by that key, there was no entrance. Sin, no matter where and upon whom found, and true repentance was the first thing he drove home with terrible earnestness to his hearers, causing their ears to tingle and their consciences to stir mightily within them. Seeing the Pharisees and Sadducees approaching, he said unto them: "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you

to flee from the wrath to come?" To the publicans who came to him, asking, "What shall we do?" he replied: "Exact no more than that which is appointed you"; be honest, set aside defrauding and cheating. To the soldiers that came asking, "What shall we do?" John answered: "Do violence to no man," quit your wild manner of living, "neither accuse any falsely," be truthful, "and be content with your wages." Confess your sinfulness, depart from that which is not in strict conformity with God's will and ways, was the tenor of his call.

And as then, so ever afterward. To quote a few examples from history: Fifteen centuries ago, not far from the shores of the Mediterranean, stood a city, notorious in the Old World for its evil life. In that city was a Christian church. There, week after week, sat a young man, thoughtful, studious, gifted, but challenging, doubting, denying the Christian religion. Twenty years passed. In the pulpit of that same church, earnestly pleading, stands the same man. What had happened? He had given up the immoral habit that made him a slave and emboldened him to dispute Christianity and held him at arms length for fear that the kingdom of heaven should come too close and enthrone itself in his inner life. In a word, he repented. This young man was none other than St. Augustine, the greatest of the early Church Fathers, the famous Bishop of Hippo, in Northern Africa. Is his a solitary instance in the story of souls?

In a city of Germany, at a university, dwelt a pious monk. Through much heart struggle he had come to a conviction of the truth. Over in a neighboring town, with much noise and display, an agent of the Pope was selling indulgences: so much money, so much remission of sins. In protest he posts up 95 theses, and what is the keynote that rings out from these but the same clarion tone of John the Baptist: "Repent ye!" — unreserved, sincere confession of your sinfulness and departure from evil. So still.

It cannot escape the attention of an observant Christian that the lessons for the season of Advent are of a serious and solemn character. In the early Church, Advent was regarded as a penitential season, much after the manner of Lent. No marriages, for instance, were solemnized, no social events permitted. Whilst this custom among us has been abrogated, so that Advent with its culmination, Christmas, means the happiest, most cordial and social season, the manner in which the early Church regarded it accounts for the solemn note that sounds through its lessons. Nor does it

bar us from making it a season of holy earnestness, of sanctifying, and turning in upon ourselves in thorough searching of heart to give the right reception to the King whose coming it announces.

Repent ye, make straight the way of the Lord, clear away the obstructions! Are any lofty, high, in their own estimate, like the Pharisees, whom John addressed, self-opinionated? Such proud hearts must be humbled, and such haughty spirit must come down to the acknowledgment that in His sight he is nothing but a poor, helpless, and condemned creature. Are any low and base in their thoughts and views of life, like the Sadducees whom John addressed, crass materialists, living only for their stomachs and for the gratification of their senses, let them be raised up to a better life, with nobler aims and purer purposes. Have any grown crooked and perverse, like the publicans and profligates whom John the Baptist addressed, deviated from the narrow path of obedience and sincere discipleship, let them resolve with God's help to walk uprightly, close their questionable connections, and act as it becomes whole-souled, devout, and consistent followers of Christ to act. Yes, "repent ye, the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" is the voice of the holy season of Advent.

2.

But the voice on Jordan's bank had still another message, more specific and more momentous. One day there comes to John, to be baptized, a majestic personage. He declares: "I have need to be baptized of Thee, and comest Thou to me?" To which Jesus replies: "Suffer it to be so now; for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness," and then, stepping down into those sacred waters, the illustrious administrator and the far more illustrious Applicant, we have the crowning scene of John's ministry — the heavens opening, a voice from the celestial heights is heard, testifying who it was that was baptized by John, while the Spirit of God, in the form of a dove, descended upon Jesus. Thereupon John gave utterance to those magnificent words, the noblest testimony that passed over his lips: "Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world," showing that he was not only a preacher unto repentance, but also a preacher of the Gospel.

Among the symbols of our church-building, the emblems in the windows and on its walls and ceilings, is also the Agnus Dei. "Agnus" means lamb; "Dei," of God. It represents a lamb carrying a cross, on which is inscribed the word *Ecce*, which means

"Behold." Each time we partake of Holy Communion, we chant the Litany: —

O Christ, Thou Lamb of God,
That takest away the sin of the world,
Have mercy upon us!

and: —

Grant us Thy peace!

And during the season of Lent we frequently use it in our Passion services. It expresses in a line the faith and marrow of our holy religion. It holds up before our eyes the crucified Savior. It is as appropriate in Advent as in Lent. The cradle led but to the cross. Bethlehem's manger pointed to the mangled form of Him who once lay therein. The significance of the former culminates in the latter. And if we would celebrate aright the holy season that is approaching, we must do what John directs, "behold." There are multitudes that have eyes and yet do not behold. It was so by that far-off river nineteen hundred years ago. How few of those whom John addressed, beheld! An Andrew, a Simon Peter, Philip and Nathanael beheld; the vast majority rejected the Baptist's message, in spite of all that popular demonstration. It is not different to-day. There is plenty of motion and commotion, the streets and the shops are astir, and a restless activity is abroad in every sphere and community, yet the real meaning of the thing men for the most part do not realize nor consider. And all for the lack of a look — the look of appreciation, confidence; the look which transfers the whole trust and affection of the heart to the object on which it rests; the look of faith on Him whose coming into the flesh all this is intended to commemorate. As it was a look, the look of mother Eve upon the forbidden fruit, which brought into our world sin and condemnation, so it is a look, a look upon yon Infant in Bethlehem's stall, that brings into it deliverance and salvation. Oh, that by faith we may cast that look and so be blessed for time and for eternity! For the grand song of the redeemed is: "Blessing and honor and glory and power be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne and unto the Lamb!" This, then, is the twofold message of our Lord's forerunner: "Repent ye and behold ye!"

Fling wide the portals of your heart,
Make it a temple set apart
From earthly use for heaven's supply,
Adorned with prayer and love and joy;
So shall your Sovereign enter in,
A new and nobler life begin.

Yours be the true and abiding Advent and Christmas blessedness! Amen.

Fourth Sunday in Advent.

And she shall bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call His name JESUS; for He shall save His people from their sins. — *Matt. 1, 21.*

In every age and among every race of men names have always been esteemed a matter of great importance. We sometimes ask, even flippantly, "What's in a name?" If we regard it thoughtfully, much, sometimes very much. A name, the title by which a person is always known, ought to be really characteristic and appropriate. We are inclined to smile when any one's name suggests ideas opposite to his actual situation and appearance. Thus when romantic names are bestowed on commonplace people, classical names like Cicero, Socrates, and the like given to modern and unlearned folk, Scriptural or church names, as, for instance, Luther, borne by the unchurchly and evil-livers, these designations appear to us absurd. This is true of all names, both family and personal. The choice, therefore, of a name for a new-born infant is very naturally and properly a subject for consideration and consultation, as we have presented to us at this season the story of the family discussion which arose over the naming of the child of Zacharias and Elizabeth; the anxiety of the relatives to call him after his father and their wonder over the decision: "His name is John," a scene which finds constant parallel and repetition in many homes to-day. Nor can any parent be careful enough in the selection of a name. It is to be regretted that the choice is not infrequently one of mere sound or euphony, without any consideration of its meaning, and there are times when it becomes necessary for the minister to reject the choice of the parents as being names of unholy and disgusting associations. Thus, to quote an instance from recent personal experience, a mother, charmed by the magic of the sound, decided to have her child christened Laverne. No one was more astonished than she when told that Laverne, in heathen mythology, was the goddess of thieves and impostors. She did not wish her little daughter to be thus stigmatized for life. When our forefathers named a child Louis, or Robert, or Charles, or Jane, or Dorothy, they had the original meanings of the words in their minds, they attached some significance to them. As we turn to the Scriptures, it is familiar to every attentive reader of the Bible that the Jews were wont to select names commemorative of some event at the birth of the child, or names which were most expressive of their thankfulness

and devotion to Almighty God. How often the sacred writers stop to give the meaning of the name! Adam, we are told, called his wife's name Eve, for she was the mother of all living. So she called her first-born Cain, for she said: "I have gotten a man from the Lord." We read of Esau, the hairy, and of Moses, drawn out of the water. Hannah called her son Samuel, which means, "Asked of God"; and the wife of Phinehas, who died giving birth to a son, when she heard of the defeat of the Israelites, the death of her husband, and the capture of the ark, named her child Ichabod, "The glory is departed from Israel."

Even more striking are those incidents where a name once given is changed, often by the command of God, to one significant of changed circumstances. Thus Abram became Abraham, father of a multitude; and Sarai, his wife, Sarah, or Princess. Jacob, after his meeting with the Angel, was known as "Israel," Prince of God. And long after Simon was named Peter, the Stone, by our Savior. Such are a few out of the many cases wherein Scripture lays special emphasis on the meaning of proper names, and others will doubtless occur to your minds.

It must be noted, in regarding the subject of names, that there are certain peculiarities of the Hebrew language and method of thought which lend additional interest and importance. Thus when we recite the Second Commandment: "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord, thy God, in vain," the name of God means not only the mere designation or title: God, Lord, but it means the attributes, power, glory of God, and all that belongs to God. His personality, character, works, are closely and inseparably identified with it. And so we are bidden to "worship His holy name," to do "honor to His name," to baptize in His name, to hallow His name; we are to believe in the name of Christ; we are to do good in His name; we have life, it says, through His name. And thus very frequently occurs the expression "the name of the Lord" when it would be more natural for us to say simply "the Lord." The Lord and His name are identified, synonymous. Another peculiarity of Hebrew phraseology is that "to be called" is, in Scriptural language, equivalent "to be so"; for example, when Isaiah says to Jerusalem: "Thou shalt be called the city of righteousness," he means, it shall *be* the city of righteousness. "My house shall be called the house of prayer for all people," means, it shall *be* the house of prayer for all people. We read of John the Baptist: "He shall be called the prophet of the Highest"; the intention

was to declare that he shall *be* the prophet of the Highest. Take the sublime Christmas prediction: "Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulders; and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace"; the assertion means that He *is* these things. Let us keep in mind these two characteristics of the Hebrew way of speaking, that the name of a person is equivalent to the person himself, and remember that "to be called" is the same as "to be," and we shall have a guide to aid us in better interpreting and understanding many passages of Holy Scripture. To quote again those words constantly recurring during these festival days, the words of the angel: "He shall be called Immanuel, which is, being interpreted, God with us."

And now let us address ourselves to the contemplation of the name mentioned in the text, "that name all other names above," the name at which every knee should bow in deep humility. We shall

1. Dwell on its meaning, *2. Make a few applications.*

1.

It must be supposed that when God selects a name and sends one of the heralds of His throne to announce it, it must be of sublime significance. "Thou," is the reading, "shall call His name Jesus." Entering upon its analysis, we find that it consists of two parts. The first syllable is the first part of the word Jehovah, hence *Je,* and the other is *hoshua.* There is a volume of instruction in both these syllables. Jehovah was the name God gave Himself in answer to Moses' repeated question at the burning bush, "Who art Thou?" "Jehovah," replied God, which means, "I am that I am," and which expresses that God is an unoriginated, absolutely independent Being, without beginning and without end. The word Jehovah was regarded by the Jews as the most reverent appellation of the Deity. It was held to be so sacred that it was pronounced only once a year and then only by the consecrated tongue of the high priest and in the holiest place in the Temple. Whenever it occurred in the holy writings, the priest or reader was never permitted to speak it, but, instead, would substitute the Hebrew word "Adonai." Now, it is this term, so expressive of the nature of God, that is employed here: "Thou shalt call His name Jesus" (Jehovah). It describes to us who it is with whom we have to do in this holiday season, namely, the same divine person who communed with Moses out of the bush, who prior to that con-

versed with Adam and Eve in Paradise, who spoke to Noah when He shut him up in the ark, who communed with Abraham at Mamre, who from the beginning of Israel's history took active concern in their affairs. Who was this? But as to this selfsame Being who is now about to become man, to be born of a virgin, His reputed father is directed to call His name Jesus, for He is Jehovah, God blessed forever, very God of very God, God manifest in the flesh. Oh, wonder of wonders! That first half of His name testifies to His divinity, His godship.

The other is the Hebrew *hoshua*, abbreviated to *sus*. *Hoshua* in Hebrew signifies deliverer, emancipator, redeemer, liberator, savior. As the first half sets forth Christ's nature, His personality, *who* He is, so this second part His office, mission, work; *what* He is — the *Savior*. And what kind of a Savior? There have been mighty saviors, deliverers, in the course of ages, men powerful in warfare, who have rid their country from oppression and bondage. We need only think of Gideon or Samuel or our own immortal Washington. And the Jews expected the Messiah to be just that kind of savior, who, they thought, would deliver them from their outward political enemies and establish again, in all splendor and extent, the empire of their early kings. But it was not such a savior, the angel here tells Joseph, that Jesus was to be. Not from your national, Roman, political oppressors will He come to deliver you, but from something far worse. The bondage from which He will relieve you is that which is the cause of all the misery, sorrow, and grief that has ever come over this world of ours, the ruin of man's happiness, the vilest thing in existence, that which has deformed and defiled and disordered the whole universe and man's soul, so that we can conceive of no evil which is not included in it; and there is nothing else with which we can compare it. That enemy and oppressor is *sin*. "He shall save His people from their sins." There you have, in those letters, the root and the spring of all the disorder, dissatisfaction, dissension, destruction, disturbance, and distress in God's fair creation. What is the cause of a Paradise lost? What is the cause of God's wrath and displeasure, temporal death, and eternal condemnation? What is the cause of that internal pollution, that inherent defilement which makes us rebels against heaven's laws and finally drags us down to perdition? What is it? You know it. The Scriptures tell us, and your own experience bears it out. And from him, that Evil Spirit, who brought it into the world, and from what it

brought into the world, its curse and punishment, its dominion and practise, He, Jesus, Jehovah, Savior, came to deliver us. "Unto you is born this day," is the Christmas tidings, "in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord." Herein lies the significance, the real intent of this high festival, its spiritual understanding, without which its outward demonstration is mere tinsel, mere shell without kernel. Herein lies the real nature, the true character, of Christ's religion. It is not, as some errorists would tell us, to save them from this or that evil of body, some affliction, sickness, or pain which tortures their limbs or fastens itself upon their organs; it is to save them from sin. This is the one great end of Christ's religion. It aims at the root. Jesus is not only a great Teacher come from God, a Way-shower, a sublime Philanthropist, or even a superb Socialist, who laid down principles, which, if followed, would do more for the amelioration of the human race than any other. Away with such low conceptions of Him if that is where our estimate of Him stops! Nay, we place our fingers on this text. We emphasize: Here the heavenly Father tells us what is His real character. He is a Savior, *the* Savior from sin. "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved."

2.

Such, then, is the explanation of the name. We cannot but ask: What is that name unto us? Some one has said that the three sweetest words in any language are Mother, Home, and Heaven. There is no denying their transporting harmony. Yet there is one that is sweeter than all of these, a word without which those three words would all be void: —

> Sweetest sound in seraphs' song,
> Sweetest note on mortals' tongue,
> Sweetest carol ever sung,

and that's the name we have been considering — Jesus. Very holy it is and very dear to the Christian heart. The believers of every age have rejoiced to sing its praises. It is carved on countless altars; it is written deep in the lives and love of devoted souls. One is shocked at the blasphemy with which men of low mind and low morals so often speak that sacred name which angels breathe only in wondering adoration, and even those who profess religion and attend God's temple would do well to regard their language and beware of calling upon the Blessed One to confirm their causes

by saying, "By Gee!" (Je) and other such careless and ungodly usages of the holiest and dearest of titles. Never ought that name to pass over human lips without a reverent bending of the head which aids and expresses the inner reverence of the heart. And as our eyes are now centered on the manger in Bethlehem, wherein lies that Babe concerning which our text gives direction, considering who and what it is, may we intelligently and sincerely confess: "I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom." Never is this confession more appropriate. And if there is a name given by which sinners may be saved, and if this is the only name; if the knowledge of this name is necessary to salvation, then it is exceedingly important that this name with its divine import and saving power should be made known to all the world. For this purpose was Christ's Church and ministry instituted, and this is the duty of every Christian as well. As we rejoice in our holiday festivities, let us not fail to bring others to rejoice, so that all men shall be blessed in Him for time and for eternity. Amen.

Christmas Day.

And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. — *Luke 2, 15.*

The festival of earth's noblest and holiest joy, the occasion for which Christendom for weeks has been preparing in service and in song, is upon us. A thrill of sacred demonstration is stirring the world. Our sanctuary is brightly adorned with emblems of green; anthems of thanksgiving and jubilant praise resound from the lips of its worshipers, and there are but few spots or relations in life into which this day does not send some brightening inspirations of good will and cheer. We hail it with delight; we bid it heartiest welcome as it again has come to us in its annual course. Not that we would detract anything from the significance of the other festivals of the church-year: Good Friday, with its lessons

of deepest solemnity; Easter morn, with its glorious message of Resurrection; Pentecost, with its blessed outpouring and influence of the Holy Spirit. Each of these is of unspeakable import to our Christian faith and hope. And yet, the loveliest, happiest, most joyous and gladsome of all festivals is the one that comes in the darkest and dreariest season of the year to cheer our homes, to brighten our friendships, and to fill our places of worship with grateful strains of hallelujahs.

And as this day, so the place with which it stands connected is regarded as most hallowed and cherished. Many are the spots in inspired story that engage our reverent and devout attention: Mount Tabor, the scene of our Lord's transfiguration; Jerusalem, the Holy City, with its cherished associations; Golgotha, the scene of our redemption; the Mount of Olives, from which Christ ascended back to glory. But of all the choice and chosen spots of the Bible and of the Holy Land there is none so sanctified and consecrated, so endeared to us, since childhood's happiest days, as that little town of Bethlehem on quiet Judea's plain. Already in Old Testament story does it connect with scenes most tender. It was there that the patriarch Jacob secured a last resting-place for his beloved Rachel, whose tomb is still standing. It was there that Ruth, the Moabitess, gleaned in the barley-fields of Boaz, that David, the son of Jesse, was anointed by Samuel to be king over Israel, and where he tuned his harp and sang his sweetest strains while tending his father's flock until called to lay aside the shepherd's staff for the regal scepter. Well do we understand the sentiment of the reverend church-father Jerome, who, when called from his residence at Bethlehem to another diocese, responded: "Nay, let me remain at the manger-bed of my Savior. Here I feel content; where my Savior was born, I wish to live and die."

To that solemn place are our holiday meditations directed: —

> Come hither, ye faithful, triumphantly sing!
> Come, see in the manger our Savior and King!
> To Bethlehem hasten with joyful accord:
> O come ye, come hither, to worship the Lord!

And thither, too, does our brief text, which would engage our Christmas devotion, in spirit conduct us. "Let us now go," is the gracious invitation, "even unto Bethlehem and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us." Following its gracious prompting, we would observe, —

1. *What is "this thing" to be seen there?*
2. *Why has the Lord made it known to us?*

1.

No sooner had the heavenly messenger who addressed the shepherds on the glory-illumined plain and his radiant escorts returned to their celestial home, and the last echo of that grand refrain died away in the skies, than, awakening from their ecstasy of wonder, the shepherds exclaimed in common emotion: "Let us now go even unto Bethlehem" and satisfy our minds as to this occurrence. With rapid steps, moved by sublimest expectation, they arrive at the little village, guided by a dim light to a certain corner of it, a grotto, or cattle-cave. What do their eyes behold? They find a sweet-faced young peasant woman, with her husband, and, as the angel said, "a babe wrapped in swaddling-clothes, lying in a manger."

What is there so remarkable in that? Miraculous as is the birth of any child, it is not so uncommon an event. Then, too, the manner in which this Child was ushered into the world. Humble, yes, even humiliating are the circumstances, betokening deepest poverty. And yet, from heaven had come the word: "Unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord." This is no ordinary child.

Away back, four thousand years before, when Adam and Eve were driven out of a Paradise lost because of their disobedience, to go down into a world cursed for their sake, this Child was spoken of in words of consolation to them. The Seed of the woman should crush the head of the Serpent, remove that curse, and restore what was lost. And ever afterwards it was the birth of that Child which formed the seed-grain of all the hopes of God's ancient people, the burden of all Old Testament prophecies.

It was the birth of that Child that was the bright lamp in the ark when it rocked upon the waves of an ocean world condemned because of its wickedness, and when, after the flood had subsided, the patriarch stepped out upon the soil of a new world, worshiping his Deliverer at the altar, which glistened with the hues of the first rainbow; and when his household became many families and these families many tribes, occupying the earth, it was the promise of that coming Child which bloomed around the tents of an Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. David sweeps his skilful hand over the strings of his harp in songs and psalms, telling of that Child. The prophets, taking up the strains, prolong and increase the sacred message, until heralds from the sky on speedy wings announce his arrival to these pious men on Bethlehem's plain.

Verily, no ordinary child, but Christ the Lord, the promised great Deliverer, the Messiah, He that was to come.

We are standing in the presence of the greatest miracle of time. Here, in those features of lowly infancy, we gaze upon the Deity. In that tiny form, encircled with swaddling-bands, is Divinity united with humanity. Infant weakness, yet God's almightiness. A weeping babe, needing the attention of a mother's friendly hands, yet adored by angels; born of a woman and lodged in a cattle-cave, yet the Lord of Glory. We stagger at the immensity of the mystery and the miracle confronting us. And the eyes of our understanding are dazzled and blind in the attempt to look into it. Verily, we exclaim with the apostle: "Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh."

That Babe the very God incarnate? Yes.

> Veiled in flesh the Godhead see;
> Hail th' incarnate Deity.
> Pleased as Man with men to dwell,
> Jesus, our Immanuel.

Not only that. The angel messenger, describing this Child, not only states that he is the Lord, but adds: "Unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior." There you have the purpose and mission of the Godhead embodied in human flesh and blood, even as you have in that word "Savior" the source and the secret and the significance of this festive day. For what is the real and chief design of this day? To cast a little cheer over this woe-begotten planet of ours; to create an opportunity for selfish man to show a little generosity and good will; to brighten childhood's mirth and send a little social radiation into our homes? Nay; good and commendable enough as this is. The root of the Christmas festivity lies deeper. Much deeper must our Christmas understanding go if it is to be a blessing to us, down to that which is the cause of all evil, of all misery, of all sorrow, of death. What is that? Who knows it not? The world is so full of it, our hearts are so full of it — only three letters! Yet what volumes of guilt and shame and destruction it expresses, that little word *sin!* And from that yon new-born Infant came to save us, as His name, "that name all other names above," the name at which every knee must bow in deep humility, Jesus, bespeaks it. None other but He could have accomplished it.

The Savior of man had to be man; for man had done the sinning. Again, the Savior had to be God because no man could

by any means redeem his brother. The Savior had to be just what he was — God; for only such a one could meet all the demands of a violated Law, make reconciliation for sin. And it is this wonderful and indispensable and unsearchable union of God and man in the person of that manger-cradled Child which this day brings before us. That is the sight we behold, "this thing" which is come to pass.

2.

And why, that is the further consideration, has the Lord made "this thing" known unto us? The speech and conduct of these shepherds, whose escorts we are this morning, tell us. Mark their speech. They do not say: "Let us now go even unto Bethlehem and see this thing which *shall* come to pass," but, "which *is* come to pass." They accept the angelic announcement as truth: they do not philosophize and skepticize; they do not fall to speculating and inquiring, Who knows whether it is so? Again, they do not say: "which the *angel* hath made known unto us," but, "which the *Lord* hath made known unto us." They accept it as a message direct from God, whose herald and messenger this angel was. Nor do they say: "which the Lord hath made known unto the *world* or unto *men*," but, "unto *us*." They might have reasoned in view of their lowliness and the unpretentiousness of their position: "After all, is this nothing but a mere hallucination? If it is the wonderful and important thing the angel said it is, why does God pass by the learned scribes and priests in the Temple; why, at least, does He not send His heavenly informant to the Holy City instead of to us poor, humble shepherds out here in the fields of a little town? Then, too, the promised Messiah, the King of Israel, the Lord and Savior of mankind, — a child, a helpless infant, wrapped in swaddling-clothes and lying in a manger, — how incredible! They might have calculated thus. Fortunately for them and us they did not. They believed the divine message with unsophisticated, ready minds, and heeding not and pleading not the darkness of the night or the obstruction of hill and plain nor the care of their flocks, they came with haste. "Let us now," is their language, "go to Bethlehem."

As they, so we. And the first thing we must do in reference to the Christmas-story, in answer to the question why God has made "this thing" known to us, is this — we must believe it. We may not be able to understand it, explain it. But why doubt or reject it because we cannot explain it? If we are not to believe,

or act on, anything until we perfectly understand it, grasp it with our narrow mortal comprehension, then we might as well cease to exist; then life would become an impossibility. We believe a thousand other things less mysterious which we cannot understand, and so, whether we are able to bring the birth of the Son of God in harmony with man's biology, physiology, metaphysics, and such like, the mystery of it is no barrier to our belief in it. The fact stands revealed, all history attests it. Our glorious Christianity sinks into empty flatness without it. The only consistent solution to that birth in Bethlehem is that which the orthodox Church holds and confesses. Christian faith grasps it as a divine reality and message and allows no skeptical theorizing of short-sighted reason to interfere with it. Therefore,

> Now let us all with gladsome cheer
> Follow the shepherds and draw near
> To see the wondrous gift of God,
> Who hath His own dear Son bestowed.

And in one other respect they may serve as our patterns. As these men on Bethlehem's plain were selected to be the first Christmas visitors at the manger-bed of the Savior, so they were also the first human Christmas preachers. Like precious liquid, warmed over a flame, first rises to the top and fills the vessel and then flows out over the brim into the fire, so the hearts of these shepherds, being filled with the oil of gladness and joy, overflowed with the ecstasies of a delight too large to be confined within the narrow limit of their own bosoms. It says of them, verse 17: "And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this Child." They told their friends and neighbors, kinsfolk and acquaintances, until the whole town was filled with the report. And we, with much clearer information to impart, we who have more than nineteen hundred years of history to rise up in evidence to the wonderfulness of this day's event, should let the topic which it presents, and which was the engrossing theme of angels and archangels, pass and not sing with lusty voice these stirring Christmas-hymns in our homes and in our temples of worship and let it be known what is the chief matter that kindles our souls within us? What type of Christianity is that? Above all the din and merrymaking let the reigning note and the sounding note with us be, not the fictitious, mythic Santa Claus, but the *Christkindlein* of our pious fathers, the Christ-child, to whom Christmas owes its existence, and from whom comes all Christmas-gifts and Christmas joys as every other good that is in this world.

To conclude: There is in Bethlehem a church edifice erected over the grotto in which tradition says Jesus was born. A large silver star lies on the spot where stood the manger; the inscription upon it reads in Latin: *Hic de virgine Maria Jesus Christus natus est.* (Here Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary.) At that spot have we in spirit lingered this morning. And as the picture of that sweetest, purest, holiest Child that ever appeared on earth rises before us, knowing what He is to us, what He has done for us, what hopes and blessedness are wrapped up in Him, what sympathy He feels for us, and what glorious kingdom of salvation He has set up for us, we rejoice in reverent thankfulness for His nativity and with sincere gratitude we would bend our knees with the shepherds in lowly adoration: —

To Thee, then, O Jesus, this day of Thy birth,
Be glory and honor through heaven and earth.
True Godhead incarnate, omnipotent Word —
O come, let us hasten to worship the Lord!

Amen.

Sunday after Christmas.

And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.

1 Tim. 3, 16.

A remarkable event had occurred in the neighborhood of the little village of Bethlehem. On one of the surrounding hills a group of shepherds were keeping watch over their flocks by night; godly and thoughtful men, waiting for the redemption of Israel. We may suppose them discussing the hopes held out to them in the prophetical Scriptures, while now and then they glanced at the condition of their flocks to see that all was safe, or lifted their eyes upward to the magnificent constellations that adorned the purple depths of the Oriental sky.

Suddenly a flood of light, as if a door had been opened in heaven, poured round about them; in the midst of the mysterious effulgence an angel, hovering on outstretched wings, proclaimed "good tidings of great joy," that "Christ, the Lord," had just been born "in the city of David." And then, as if to confirm his words, the portals of the celestial heights were thrown back, and behind the central angel, tier after tier, rose a bright choir, a multitude

of seraphic voices singing, in tones which thrilled the heavens in never-to-be-forgotten melody, the first Christmas-carol: "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will toward men."

No sooner had the heavenly visitants returned to their realms, and no sooner had the shepherds recovered a little from the startling effect of the vision, than they agreed to set out at once for Bethlehem and ascertain for themselves what it was that had come to pass. Let us follow them in imagination. Pacing with hasty steps and rapidly descending the hillside, we soon come to the village caravansary, or inn; and guided by a dim light to a certain corner of it, a grotto, we find a sweet-faced young peasant woman with her husband, and, lying by their side, in a cattle-trough, the only place that could be found for Him to repose in — a little Infant. And we stand, reverently gazing at the Savior Child.

Now, how shall we interpret what we behold? The birth of a child is not such a very uncommon event. And there seems to be nothing so remarkable about the manner in which this Child has been ushered into the world. The parents are not princes. The place is not a palace. The only attendants are the meek-eyed oxen, which stand not very far off. Everything betokens deepest poverty and extreme humbleness. Is this, then, a mere human child, or is there something peculiar and exceptional about Him? You know how we Christians answer such questions. We say that in spite of appearances the little Child who lies there before us in infant feebleness is very God of very God, the eternal and only-begotten Son of the Father, who for certain great purposes thus manifested Himself in human flesh and became one of us. We believe that this great mystery has been revealed to us by the Father Himself; and on it we base and build our hopes of spiritual life in this world and of everlasting life in the world to come. That is what we say.

And therein is to be found the explanation and meaning of the bright and joyous services of this holiday season. If that Child be no more than a mere human child, the whole purpose of our assembling to-day is a mistake, a delusion, and a snare. For the sake, then, of deepening our conviction, of strengthening our faith, our hopes, our grasp on all that connects with our holy religion, let us note two things: —

1. *That the Incarnation is indeed a great mystery.*
2. *That it is a blessed, glorious, and comforting mystery.*

1.

The doctrine of the Incarnation, *i. e.*, that God became man, to use the words of the text, "that God was manifest in the flesh," is, perhaps, more than other truths in the Bible, a doctrine of pure revelation, something which we can know and learn only from the Bible and from no other source. There are doctrines in God's Book of which men with the aid of reason and conscience have obtained at least some conception, however hazy and vague. There is, for instance, the doctrine that there is a God. We need not open the Bible to learn that; we need but open our eyes. God! — that word may be read in the heavens and on the face of the sun, everywhere, on each and every page of the great book of nature. It is a word that is painted on every flower and whispered by every wind. For any man in his sound and sober senses to dispute and deny that is a monstrosity, a moral suicide. What should we think of one who, gazing at this church-building or inspecting its furniture, let us say our organ, would seek to account for these constructions of beauty and of evident design by telling us that it is a product of chance, that the material of which this building is composed, and the pipes and pedals that produce such harmony, just happened to so come together, that nobody made them and put them there, — how we would stare at him! We would conclude, without a moment's hesitation, that he is a poor unfortunate whose mind is not what it ought to be. Reason already understands and readily asserts that the heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows His handiwork, — asserts the existence of a God.

The same is true with regard to the doctrine that man is a sinner. We need not open our Bible to learn that. It is enough for us to open our hearts and read in the light of conscience the blotted record of a past life. "I know and approve the better and yet follow the worse," was the memorable saying of one of the wisest heathen; yet it needs no particular wisdom to arrive at that truth. Travelers tell us that the rudest tribes of Africa, on whose darkness no ray of Bible knowledge has ever fallen, are ready to admit that they are sinners. Indeed, it is painful to read how through all ages and throughout all the earth costly offerings have been made and horrid sacrifices have been rendered to propitiate the anger of a sin-hating God; how the mothers of India will even wrest their babes from their throbbing breasts to fling them into

the waters of the "holy" Ganges and Brahmaputra in the hope of averting Heaven's wrath because of their sins. Ever since Adam and Eve left a Paradise lost and Cain, their first-born, fled from his brother's grave a conscience-stricken fugitive, man has been carrying about with him a Law deeper than the commandments graven on tables of stone on Mount Sinai; and this Law tells him that he is a sinner.

And while speaking along this line, there is one other doctrine that man by indestructible intuition believes, and that is the doctrine that the soul survives the stroke of death, that, whatever may become of the body, our spiritual essence is immortal, that it never dies. That is a belief formed wherever man has breathed and breathes. Why did the ancient Greeks open the mouth of the dead person as he lay ready for burial and put in a coin as the passage-money for the surly ferryman, who, according to their conception, rowed the spirits over the stream of Styx; and why, in our own country, did they bury with the body of an Indian chief his canoe, and his bow and arrow? In the specter land, where the Great Spirit lives and the spirits of his fathers had gone before, he would continue to chase and hunt the deer.

What are these beliefs but remnants, glimmerings, left of man's once perfect knowledge of true religion, faint indeed, without certainty and positiveness, yet still existing and showing what we desire now to point out — that man regarding some things has a certain deeper knowledge?

Different, much different, from these and standing out all the more prominently, as a great and sacred mystery, which nature nowhere teaches, neither by reason nor analogy, nor conscience, is the doctrine which engages our thoughts at this time, the doctrine of God incarnate, the mystery of godliness, as the text reads: "God was manifest in the flesh." That is a doctrine which we can learn only from the Bible; a doctrine which we must approach with a faith similar to that of a little boy, whom his father takes out beneath the starry sky, telling him that these little bright and twinkling lights are planets, bodies as big as our earth. To view the Christmas event, we must put the telescope of faith to our eyes and, thus supplied, step to that manger in Bethlehem.

What do we see? A new-born babe, helpless, wrapped in swaddling-bands, needing the services of an earthly mother. What is there remarkable about that?

From heaven comes word that this is no ordinary child. Angelic messengers proclaim Him "the Son of the Highest," "Christ, the Lord." We look, we listen, we wonder. And well we ought, for we are in the presence of the greatest and sublimest miracle of time. That manger-cradled Babe yonder is God. Deity in lowly infancy, Divinity and humanity taken into personal unity with each other. Human words are inadequate to express it. Here is divine immensity enclosed in a little human body, Omnipotence shrouded in infant weakness, the Adored of angels in the condition of a weeping child, the Lord of Glory born of a woman and lodged in a cattle-cave. How can it be? A mystery, yes, so says the text. A great mystery, impenetrable. But what of it? The mystery of a thing is no barrier to its truthfulness. What if it does transcend all scientific explanation, if we cannot explain biology, physiology, and metaphysics of the Savior's birth? What if the depths are too great for human intelligence to fathom? The wonderful fact is that nothing can overthrow it. All history attests it. Our glorious Christianity is rooted in it. No other solution is there of the Christmas fact. That babe was God incarnate. So Joseph and Mary understood and received their holy charge; so the shepherds understood when they followed the divine command of the celestial spokesman; so the Wise Men took Him to be and paid Him homage; so Christian faith this day accepts Him and rejoices over Him as the foundation fact of our holy religion. A glorious, most blessed fact! "Great," as the text declares, "is the mystery of godliness." That is our second consideration.

2.

An aged minister of my acquaintance once remarked: "The nearer I approach the eternal world, the more wonderful the Incarnation appears to me." It is wonderful, so wonderful indeed that the apostle says that the angels of God desire to look into it. That the infinite and holy God should be made in the likeness of sinful flesh, as our hymn-book expresses it, that He, "who heaven and earth did make a humble servant's form doth take," verily is astounding.

That God should be manifest at all is wonderful. That He should be manifest, not as an archangel or an angel, but in flesh, is more mysterious still. Gold, when it is mixed with silver, is abased; how much more if it is joined with the rust of iron or

with the miry clay! Truly wonderful is the incarnation of the Son of God as to its motive.

For what was it that moved Him thus to manifest Himself? No more fitting words can we inscribe over the Bethlehem scene, the manger-bed of our new-born Redeemer, than these: "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

The Incarnation is the setting up of the highest, the greatest, the most wonderful monument of God's unspeakable love. The world that He has made declares His eternal power and Godhead. The history of time proclaims His sovereignty, that He is the Governor of the nations. There is much in our personal experience to show His tender providence and kindness; but nowhere do we find the fulness, the sublime and greatest possible stretch of His love, of His divine goodness and mercy to needy and helpless man as in the Incarnation, that He was manifest in the flesh. It is simply immeasurable, inexplicable.

And to continue our reflection. It is this fact that gives such efficacy to our redemption. Our Redeemer had to be God. None else could redeem us. No man could by any means redeem his brother or give to God a ransom for him, for the redemption of their soul is precious, and it ceaseth forever. Man, fallen and corrupt in sin, could not extricate himself from sin; a prey to his spiritual enemies, his was not the power to overcome them. More helpless than an infant in a giant's grasp was he in the hands of the wicked foe. And who was to deliver him from the terrors of death? Silly twaddle is the contention that careful culture, knowledge, and development of his own powers would enable man to throw off evil and ultimately reach a complete sense of good and happiness.

"Neither," declare the Scriptures, "is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." Six thousand years have given proof of that. Without supernatural intervention there is no such thing as redemption for man. Redemption means miracle; and here is a miracle — "Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh." Why? To quote the words of the Nicene Creed: "Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary and was made man." It was the only way that man could find back to God, that God became man.

And one concluding reflection, — what comfort lies in this!

A beautiful story is told by Homer, the ancient Greek poet. He relates how Hector, the hero, was going to his last battle, and his wife Andromache accompanied him as far as the gates of the city, followed by a nurse carrying in her arms their infant son. When he was about to depart, Hector held out his hands to receive the little one, but, terrified by the burnished helmet and the waving plume, the child turned away and clung crying to the nurse's neck. In a moment, surmising the cause of the infant's alarm, the warrior took off his helmet and laid it on the ground, and then, smiling through his tears, the little fellow leaped into his father's arms.

Now, similarly, Jehovah, the Lord of hosts, with the helmet on, in the manifestation of His glory as He showed it to us on Mount Sinai, would cause us guilty sinners to quake and fear; but in the person of the Lord Jesus He has laid off, as it were, his helmet, and now the guiltiest and the neediest are encouraged to go to His Savior embrace. While we need One who is mightier than any human brother, we need One who has also a brother's heart, who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities — a friend. Such a one we have in Jesus Christ, the God-man. Here we have the omnipotence of Divinity, added to the accessibility of humanity. God incarnate in Jesus Christ attracts; for He comes with all the sympathies of human nature and still with all the help and strength of the divine. He is the nearest, dearest, closest, most intimate Friend that you possess, before whom you can pour out your heart as before no one else.

It is this doctrine that is necessary for us to understand for a proper appreciation and celebration of the present festival season. And thus, as we stand this morning gazing on that little Child in the manger, let it be with hearts full of thankfulness and praise, and let us say to ourselves: Here is the starting-point, the beginning, of all the blessings which we are enjoying now, and which we shall continue to enjoy hereafter, throughout the countless ages of eternity.

May each return of Christmas give us a firmer faith, a more profound adoration of "the great mystery of godliness: God made manifest in the flesh"! Amen.

New Year's Day.

Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing instant in prayer.
Rom. 12, 12.

When the ancient people of God were on their wilderness passage from Egypt to the Holy Land, we read that "according to the covenant of the Lord they journeyed, and according to the covenant of the Lord they encamped." The latter we did in our service last evening — we encamped for a little while before God's altar, and glancing in solemn review over the departed year, we dwelt in gratitude and praise upon His manifold benefits and blessings. This morning we would heed the other portion of the covenant: "Tell ye the children of Israel that they journey," that they grasp anew with a firm hand their pilgrim's staff, gird their traveling garments about their loins and pass on; another section lies before them, 365 days. Nor will they be without provision and sustenance for each day. The children of Israel had their manna, which daily fell round about them; the water they needed gushed from the rock of Horeb; the Lord gave them the pillar of cloud in the daytime and the pillar of fire at night to guide and direct them.

We are not less provisioned: "Manna from heaven falls fresh every eve, food to supply our hearts, thirst to relieve." Here in these sacred pages is the ground upon which it lies; here is the divine fountain from which it gushes forth. Let us in these moments seek to gather a measure of enlivening, comforting supply for another stretch in life's pilgrimage. It has been our custom on this day to select a motto-text for the year. For the most it has been a blessed promise from God's Word for our guidance and inspiration during the year; occasionally, and so to-day, it is an exhortation from the Word of God. Addressing ourselves to it, we would resolve to be —

1. Rejoicing in hope, *2. Patient in tribulation,*
3. Instant in prayer.

1.

Futurity — that is what impresses our minds to-day — means uncertainty, and uncertainty suggests anxiety. Mysterious, involved in nebulous outlines, does the year lie before us; our footsteps on its virgin soil are halting and infirm. What will it bring forth? Our thoughts naturally run forward. Nor does God for-

bid it. Says King Solomon: "A wise man deviseth his way." It is not a sign of sanity nor of Christianity to walk into the future with eyes blindfolded, irresolutely, improvidently. The man of business who at this time looks over his stock and his ledger and strikes a balance of profit and loss, so as to make provident arrangements for the incoming year, the man of family who gazes upon the members seated about his table and weighs demands and expenditures, income and ability to make ends meet, indeed, every one, whatever his situation or relation may be, does well intelligently to form his plans and frame his resolutions.

However, that is one thing. Another, quite another, not an uncommon one, rather too prevalent and requiring restraint, is that to which the text has reference; to look into the future with fear, anxiety of mind, trembling of heart: "Oh! how shall we ever get through?" It has been none too rosy in the past; income none to boast of, debts and obligations yet to pay; encumbrance here, hindrance there. What a nightmare these considerations are to many at the threshold of a new year! They crush out the feeling of good cheer and make that very thing which they wish one another — happiness — a word of mockery; to which we remark, "It is needless, and it is godless."

A man, bending under the weight of a heavy load, meets a passing wagon. "Get in, friend." He does so, but still keeps the load on his back. That is the common attitude. God's chariot drives up to us this morning, overtakes us in life's way. "Get in, traveler; I will bear thee along," is the invitation. "Cast all thy care upon Me; I will comfort you." "Thank Thee, kind Lord, but I prefer to bear the load myself." What folly! Says the apostle: "Rejoice in hope." There is a Providence that has brought us into this world and pledged Himself to take us through it. God (pardon the expression) knows His business, and He is fully able to attend to it. A silly child that will start a great ado and cry that its wealthy father cannot feed and clothe it any longer! Inconsistent Christian who will agitate himself for fear that God cannot provide for him any more! He bids you do your duty, supplies you strength to do so: to procure an honest livelihood, to earn your bread in the sweat of your brow, by the exertion of your brain or brawn, and the rest He bids you commit to Him. To that end he has pledged His power, and that power is unlimited; to that end He employs His wisdom, and that wisdom is unerring, infallible, and knoweth what is really best for us; to that end He

exercises His love toward us, a love that is infinite and sincere; for how shall not He who spared not His dearest and highest gift, His Son, with Him freely give us all things? And when — think and tell it honestly — has His care ever failed you? Oh, ye of little faith! Look not only forward, look upward, hopefully, trustfully.

He who hitherto hath fed you
And to many a joy hath led you
Is and shall be ever thine.

That is the first quality that enters into a prosperous, happy new year. As the great and divine antidote against distressing anxiety "rejoice in hope." "The Lord God Omnipotent reigneth." Amid all its emergencies and changes cultivate a rejoicing, cheerful heart.

All depends on our possessing
God's free love and grace and blessing,
Though all earthly wealth depart.
He who God for his hath taken
'Mid the changing world unshaken
Keeps a free, heroic heart.

God grant us such a free, heroic heart on this initial day and on all succeeding days of this incoming year!

2.

The second requisite, according to the apostle's exhortation, is "patience in tribulation." We will need that. "Man," remarks the inspired poet, "is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward," and God's children, far from being exempt, sometimes seem to have a double portion of tribulation. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous," and "we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." "Tribulation" originally, according to its literal, primary sense, means "friction," the same thing that happens to grains of wheat when they are ground, crushed, in the mill. In the life of a Christian it means provocation, exasperation. These are plentiful. It is a tormenting world that we live in. Human nature, whether it be in ourselves or in others, is a crabbed, harassing thing. In our workshops and offices, what a multitude of vexations to disturb the composure of one's spirit! In our homes scarcely a day passes but some little things go wrong, annoyances occur. How frequently words indiscreetly used offend our feelings, and we are misunderstood by those of whom we think we have a right to be most understood, and who, we feel, ought to bear with us. Add to this other vexations and galling circumstances, reverses and losses, physical sickness, disability to do what we see

others doing; moreover, bereavements, deaths, and, what is often worse, some calamity and deep sorrow. And it becomes a question of practical importance: How shall we meet these various tribulations and, in the midst of so many provoking ills and depressing circumstances, preserve the character and temper of a Christian?

The apostle recommends Christians to be "patient in tribulation." What is patience? Patience, according to God's Word, has a twofold aspect, toward God and toward man. Patience is the endurance of evil in the expectation of good or, as divines express it, "a suffering patience and a waiting patience." Toward God we are patient when we submit ourselves to His will, and that not in a stupid, insensible manner or with a philosophical stoicism, — what must be, must be, and we must bow to the inevitable, — but with the full and satisfied conviction that all is right — the result of a Wisdom, Faithfulness, and Love that knows best and makes all things work together for good to them that love Him. This sort of patience is a religious principle, a fruit of God's Holy Spirit working in the heart. Nor is there anything more becoming a Christian — for it shows that religion is a deep conviction — than to see a believer meeting his afflictions, enduring his griefs, with composure, with a majesty of submission, a disposition that speaks the words: "It is the Lord; let Him do what seemeth Him good."

Over against one's fellow-men patience manifests itself in the cultivation of forbearance and meekness. There is no virtue in common life that more recommends our religion than checking ourselves with regard to angry words, keeping an even temper, giving a gentle answer in response to grievance, perverseness, malice, and doing so from a desire to imitate Him who was Patience itself, our great Master and Exemplar, Christ Jesus. Moreover, it is the sovereign way in which to secure what men are wishing one another this day — happiness.

The old fable of the sun and wind which once had a quarrel as to which one of them could pull the mantle from the traveler's shoulders the quickest, is well known to us. The wind blew upon the man with all its energy, but the harder it blew, the more tightly did he wrap his mantle around his person. Then the sun shone in mild and gentle radiance, and under its soft and genial warmth he soon began to unbutton his cloak and presently threw it off altogether. This is an illustration of the power of gentleness exercised under provocation, the tribulations of life.

Let us thoughtfully consider the second particular of the divine exhortation: patient submission under God's chastisements and ways; long-suffering, forbearance toward others, their vexations, and with His help give it attention and cultivate it with a view to discovering what will be its beneficial results, and you will be surprised how much smoother will be the year's pathway, how much happier you will be.

3.

And to come to the final, the last, but by no means the least, observation. How can we attain to such a disposition as we have been regarding? How can we rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, poor, dependent creatures that we are, so readily distressed, with inflammable tempers such as we all, more or less, possess? How can we succeed even with the noblest of New Year resolves?

Let one of God's inspired men inform you, a man who had tested its reality and value. Read the last clause and direction: "Continuing instant in prayer."

Many years ago an aged and ragged Indian wandered into one of our Western settlements, begging for food to keep from starving. A bright-colored ribbon was seen around his neck, from which there hung a small, dirty pouch. On being asked what it was, he said it was a charm given him in his younger days. He opened it and took out a worn and crumbled paper, which he handed the person speaking to him for inspection. It proved, on examination, to be a regular discharge from the Federal Army, entitling him to a pension for life and signed by the Commander-in-Chief himself, George Washington. Here was a man with a promise duly signed, which, if presented in the right place, would have secured for him ample provision for life, and yet he was wandering about hungry, helpless, and forlorn, begging for bread to keep him from starving. What a picture we have here of many Christians! They are distressed, worried, chafing under life's adversities, and at their command is the wonderful resource, the efficient means of dispelling all depression and enduring their tribulations courageously. Indeed, how little we use what can accomplish so much! Words more simple and more true were never written than these; which we shall quote in full: —

What a Friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer!

Oh, what peace we often forfeit,
Oh, what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer!

Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged, —
Take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a friend so faithful,
Who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness, —
Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy laden,
Cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Savior, still our Refuge, —
Take it to the Lord in prayer.
Do thy friends despise, forsake thee?
Take it to the Lord in prayer;
In His arms He'll take and shield thee,
Thou wilt find a solace there.

Peter, with the waves angrily tossing about him on the Sea of Galilee and looking at himself, was ready to sink. Peter, extending his hand to the Savior, walks to safety.

Prayer is power. What better homes we would have, and happier, if parents would pray for their children and children for their parents, if husbands would pray for their wives and wives for their husbands! What better congregations, and happier, if the members would pray for their pastors and the members one for another! How much less complaint, but how much more cordiality and prosperity in pew and pulpit! Oh, for a closer walk with God, a living and loving converse, a trustful, patient, prayerful looking up to Him, thinking of Him, living with Him, referring all to Him!

For a year of happiness let us, then, adopt these words as our motto, write them over the portals of this twelvemonth, inscribe them in our memorandums. Keep them ever before our minds as the days and hours roll along: "Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing instant in prayer." Amen.

Epiphany.

Enlarge the place of thy tent and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations; spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes; for thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left, and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles. — *Is. 54, 2. 3.*

Among the many and great achievements which modern science and invention have accomplished, not the least is the closeness into which the different countries and continents of the earth have been brought. By the application of nature's forces there has been established a nearness and a rapidity of intercourse between nations and men hitherto entirely undreamed and unheard of. We think, for instance, of that stupendous enterprise of human skill and perseverance which laid a cable thousands of miles in length at the bottom of the sea, permitting a message that previously required so many weeks to be dispatched in so many minutes. We think of, and we marvel at, the mysterious devices and transmissions of wireless telegraphy and other inventions, such as the radiograph, by which time and distance are overcome and our globe encircled in the space of a little while.

But, my beloved, marvelous as are these achievements, there is an enterprise which surpasses that submarine cable and those other means of communication, an invention which originated not in the ingenious mind of man, but in the counsel of God's infinite wisdom, a device which spans not only a few countries, but unites the entire race of man from one point of the compass to the other. The device I refer to is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the message of God's universal salvation, the message of peace and good will which 1923 years ago was broadcast from Bethlehem's town, and has been having free course to this present day, its communications being heralded in all territories and zones, in the ice-bound North and in the torrid South, to the Eskimos at the top of our continent and to the Patagonians at the bottom, in the East to the adherents of Confucius and Mohammed and in the West to the worshipers of crude and grotesque idols.

Being intelligent Christians, you have no doubt already grasped the tenor of to-day's discourse. We are celebrating Epiphany, a festival properly observed on the sixth day of January in remembrance of the Wise Men who came from the East, led by the miraculous star, to worship our infant Redeemer. The significance of that visit was that these men were the first representa-

tives and forerunners of the heathen or Gentile world to do Christ homage, and hence we call this festival Epiphany, which means the manifestation, or showing, of Christ, the new-born Savior, to the Gentiles; for these few men from the East were followed by thousands and tens of thousands in the course of time, among them our ancient forefathers, the uncivilized and unchristianized Teutons and Germanic tribes, who came under the sway of the Gospel. It is to this event that the words of the prophet just read apply.

Not to the limited, narrow kingdom of Israel are the words of our text to be restricted, but they find their true fulfilment in that spacious kingdom of Jesus Christ which is to endure throughout all generations. Reads the divine exhortation: "Enlarge the place of thy tent and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations; spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes." There you have also the duty of the Church to-day. It has two things to do. On the one hand, it must ever seek larger room, new territory, new domains; on the other hand, it must strengthen the things which remain and which all too often are ready to die. Otherwise expressed, the Church must adopt the policy of aggressive and expansive outward development, yet also that of inward establishment, of rooting and grounding itself more firmly in the foundation posts of the Christian faith. That is what is meant by "lengthening the cords and strengthening the stakes," and this lengthening and strengthening must go hand in hand if the Church is to answer her God-appointed destiny. That, accordingly, is the topic of our Epiphany sermon: —

The Divine Call: Lengthen and Strengthen!

Let us observe what that expresses, and make due application.

1.

The appeal that rings out from this line is very simple and unmistakable. We are to enlarge the place of our tent. We are continually to be making more room. This exhortation is very much in place; for one of the dangers threatening the Church is at all times ever to be content with narrow boundaries, satisfied with less than God has in store for her. When our Lord, departing this world from Mount Olivet, gave as His parting charge: "Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost," the apostles fully understood the divine instructions given them. "Mightily," we

read, "grew the Word of God and prevailed." Beginning at Jerusalem, they proceeded in all directions like the lines of a circle from the center; the Gospel spread from city to city, from province to province, from clime to clime, taking the countries of Asia, visiting the islands of the sea; reaching the countries of Europe, it was preached in Macedonia and Greece, Italy, Gaul, and Britain; in short, there was no limit and no stop. The whole earth was the apostles' territory and the uttermost parts their possession. But how quickly this glorious progress came to an end!

The Church, its history reads, nestled down to ease and lethargy. Little or nothing was done throughout the long centuries of the so-called Middle Ages. A revival took place at the time of the Lutheran Reformation. The historic fact is that the Lutheran Church is the pioneer Church of present-day foreign missions. Yet did the ardor instilled by the great Reformation not last long. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, we may safely say, the Church had forgotten the direction of this text. Missions were practically unknown. The interest of Christian people did not extend farther than the boundaries of their own country. Then in the providence of God a marvelous change took place. To speak with a few figures and facts: About seventy-five years ago there were but 500 mission-stations in foreign lands; now there are some 30,000. Then the missionary force, all told, was 20,000; to-day over 100,000. The adherents are now estimated at 4,000,000, with over 1,000,000 children attending more than 3,000 Christian schools. Or to speak a little more in detail: In 1800 there were no Protestant missions in China; 60 years ago there were only five or six avowed converts to Christianity. Now some 40 to 50 societies are at work, and with such telling effect as nearly to revolutionize that sleeping power. In 1855 the first missionary landed in the Fiji Islands; the people were utterly heathen, savage and ferocious cannibals, fighting among themselves continually, fattening, for slaughter to be eaten, the prisoners taken in war. They buried their sick alive, burned their widows, in short, were given up to the most abominable rites and practises. Now, in every one of those eighty inhabited islands there is a tidy church and a house for the minister, and the first sound in the morning and the last at night is that of family prayers in almost every dwelling. Nor is this a single instance. The same story can be rehearsed of India and Madagascar, the Sandwich Islands, Syria, and so forth.

And still the call comes: Lengthen your cords; for though much has been done, much remains to be done. It is the custom of missionaries to operate with charts and maps. In conformity we unfold before our mind's eye a map of this inhabited globe. Let us paint the parts belonging to Mohammedanism gray, those lying in heathen darkness black, and the countries styled Christian white, and then compare them. You will be startled. To express it in figures: Placing this earth's population at 1,500,000,000 and granting, as is generally calculated, that there are 500,000,000 nominal Christians in the world, what about the billion? What about the two-thirds that remain steeped in paganism and Mohammedanism, without hope and without God? Yes, what about them?

2.

A month ago there stood up in this church the venerable form of a missionary from China, the pioneer missionary of our Synod to that country, and after a few hours of most interesting and instructive discourse he put one question: "Why," he asked, "is it that we, possessing the Gospel in its truth and purity, are so remiss in promoting mission operations? Why is it that a ship bringing hundreds of mission-workers brings only one or two of our denomination?" That question, from the lips of a man of deepest consecration and self-sacrifice, fell heavily on my heart, as no doubt it did upon the hearts of others. What shall we answer? Have we forgotten our Lord's command? The time was, sad to say, when the duty of evangelizing the heathen was actually disputed and denied. There are some in the Church to-day who will tell us we ought not to think of visiting India and China and Japan, which already possess religions suitable to the genius of the people. Astounding ignorance of the fundamentals of our holy Christian faith! It is evident that the Gospel cannot publish itself to the nations. Nor will the nations be moved by an impulse of their own to come where the Gospel is, seeking its light and salvation. No; the treasures of grace and truth lie enclosed in a silent, speechless Volume, and it is for those who have that Volume in their hands and are blessed with its joys and hopes to fulfil the purpose of God in respect to it. The living preacher going forth to publish the glad tidings and the friends of the Redeemer sustaining and supporting the preacher are the representatives and select agents through whom this mission command is to be carried out. You have heard how in the seventh century Gregory the Great

one day, passing through the market-place of Rome, saw some young Anglo-Saxons on sale for slaves. He was so struck with their fair complexion that he was led to inquire regarding their country, and on being told (in Latin) that they were Angli, he uttered the words: *"Non Angli, sed angeli, si essent Christiani"* ("Not Anglians, but rather angels, if they were only Christians"), and forthwith he resolved to bring the Gospel to their native country. We are they to whom the divine appeal is directed.

And how far is the work to be done? There is no limitation given. "Go ye," was the Savior's explicit commission, "into all the world," to its uttermost parts, wherever dwells on the face of this earth a soul that is perishing from lack of knowledge of the true God and His saving Gospel. There are those who contend that Christ's kingdom is confined to certain races. They say Christianity is a Western religion, suitable to the Western mind, but it makes no appeal to the Eastern, or Oriental, whose religious wants are supplied much better by Buddha and Confucius; and thus they limit the spread of the Gospel. But God spurns such ungodly limits of man's imposition. They fly in the face of God's plan of mercy as disclosed in the Bible and show that men have not understood the coming of our Savior into this world. As wide as are the ruins of man's fall into sin, it is for us to spread abroad the blessings of salvation. The story of the founding of the city of Constantinople may be familiar. It is related that Emperor Constantine, upon the site where now stands the great Eastern city, received instructions in a dream to build a new capitol for his empire on that spot. The next day, with a lance in his hand, he marked the boundary of the destined capitol, going on and on, until one of his attendants in astonishment exclaimed, "When are you going to stop?" "When the unseen guide who marches before me bids me stop," was the emperor's reply. And so with the Church, — when is she going to stop her work? Our Guide will not bid us stop until every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Until then the Church will hear from the lips of her Master the summons: "Lengthen thy cords!"

And where there is a bosom in which the Gospel has gained lodgment and shed abroad its peculiar spirit, it will heed that divine summons. One of the first effects of Christ's religion, when it has come into the heart, is to awaken interest in the spiritual welfare of others, to prompt the inquiry: "Lord, what wilt Thou

have me to do" — do for my family, for my neighbors and friends, for my country and the world, that all may be blessed with Thy salvation? It was this spirit, the hope he cherished of extending the kingdom of Christ, which actuated, as much as any other, a Christopher Columbus in his great enterprise of discovering America. It was this spirit which impelled the distinguished Lutheran King Gustavus Adolphus to establish on these shores a colony among the wild inhabitants, the Indians, to convert them to Christ. It was this spirit which impelled those noble missionaries, such as Schwartz, Ziegenbalg, Hans Egede, and hundreds of others who could be mentioned, to go forth from their native land to bear the tidings of salvation to the heathen world. It is this spirit which prompts the missionaries of to-day to devote their energy, strength, and life to this noble work. How can this spirit be lacking in any heart warmed with the love of Christ and grateful to Him for His redeeming grace?

It may be out of the question for you to engage personally in this work, to go far away into the heathen world; but there are other ways in which you may help forward the good work we are considering. You may assist it by your prayers, and if you have the spirit of Christ and know how to pray, no petition will break from your lips more frequently or rise from the heart with greater fervor than this: "Thy kingdom come." And with your prayers you may also give your contributions, and that most cheerfully. You will feel that little enough it is that you can do in that manner, while others are giving their personal energy, even life itself. Rely upon it, this is a point of vital importance in respect to the sincerity of your religious life in all the evidences we witness among you — and they are many — of the interest you show in God's cause. We regret, deeply regret, to receive such communications as the following. Permit me to read it (an appeal for funds by the Board of Foreign Missions).

Whole tribes and villages are actually pleading for missionaries, a thing almost unknown in mission history, and the answer? "We have no men." Friends of missions, Christians, can you not put yourselves in the places of our valiant missionaries as they must give this answer? Can you not feel a bit of their soul anguish as they see those poor souls wending their sorrowful way back to their sin-darkened homes to report that there is not enough Christian love in the home churches to furnish them with the light they are seeking? How can we answer this call to our consciences?

How can we turn a cold ear to those perishing heathen who need us so badly, and go on our way indifferently, earning money and spending it often for selfish purposes? Truly, as one says: "A Christian must have an unmistakable reason for not going to the foreign field before he dare stay at home and leave the work to others." But even if we do feel justified in staying at home, the heathen call for something from each and every one of us.

In view of such appeals, is it not of great importance that the missionary spirit should be assiduously cultivated in our hearts, in our families, in our churches, in our colleges and theological seminaries? And just in proportion as it reigns there, will we, to speak with our text, strengthen our stakes. If one fact stands forth as unquestionable, it is this: The more religion we send abroad, the more we shall have at home. Never was the Church more flourishing than in those periods of her history when she was most actively engaged in mission operations. It was so in the days of early Christianity. It has been so ever since. To mention a specific instance: The Moravians began their noble efforts for the conversion of the heathen about two centuries ago. A congregation consisting of 600 persons organized themselves into a mission body at Herrnhut and nobly resolved to spread the Gospel throughout the world. Their success has been phenomenal. Meanwhile the little band at home multiplied into a large number of congregations.

This experience is in perfect accord with God's rule: "Give, and it shall be given unto you." In proportion as the spirit of missions gains ground and excites to prayer and effort, the Gospel is prized more highly by those who possess it, and the fruits of a vigorous and growing piety abound. It was wont to be said in ancient times that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church. It may be said with equal truth that the spirit of missions is the seed, the element, of spiritual prosperity as regards both individual Christians and congregations.

The Lord open our eyes that we may see our duty; and may He so move us by His Spirit that we shall perform it with a perfect heart and a willing mind! Let it have your most earnest thought, your fervent and importunate prayers, your cheerful and generous contributions, and, if Providence so directs, your personal service. Amen.

First Sunday after Epiphany.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord; for this is right. Honor thy father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise: That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.
Eph. 6, 1—3.

The first commandment of the second table of God's Law is the commandment to honor our parents. It is placed first because next in importance to the duties we owe to God are the duties we owe to God's chief representatives on earth, *i. e.*, our parents. The commandment in question is the only commandment of the ten to which God has seen fit to annex a promise: "That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth." And, as to the opposite, children in the Old Testament disobeying were threatened with the severest punishment.

The Fourth Commandment is a commandment which all nations, civilized and uncivilized, have held to be sacredly binding, and experience shows that as it is obeyed, so will all the other obligations of social life be fulfilled, that the dutiful child will become the good parent, the devoted husband, the loyal citizen, the faithful friend, the true church-member. It is a commandment which our Lord Himself signally honored in His life, down to the last moments of His painful death upon the cross — considerations sufficient why it should demand our occasional mention. Prompted, then, by the text, let us dwell a little upon the duties of children, whether grown or small, to their parents, as we find it illustrated and enforced by the example of our Lord; and may our remarks, made in all simplicity and earnestness, be to the profit of our souls and conduct!

First we may remark that the subjection, referred to by the holy writer, of our Lord to His parents was that of respect. And here we touch upon a particular regarding which it is said there is a great deficiency among our youth. In the Old World, with its rigid, restricted usages and institutions, it is claimed, parental authority is much more venerated; that our institutions, founded on the principles of liberty, independence, are not quite so conducive to reverence for age and to the restraints of authority, and that "Young America" needs much correction in this respect. If that is true, then it calls for watchful care on the part of the parents and on the part of the young people themselves. It does the unfledged bird venturing too soon from its nest no good to fly

before it is able and to stretch forth its incompetent wings, and then to sink exhausted to the ground. And so the child that gains its liberty too soon may pay the price of that premature independence, not only in the sighs and sorrows of a parent's heart, but in the disappointment of its own expectations and the ultimate ruin of its own soul. So, then, for their own good and that of their superiors, there must be respect, reverence. How should this manifest itself?

We shall mention a few ways. First in the feelings and thoughts of children. The inmost thoughts of a child should be imbued with reverence for those who gave it being. Let it never be forgotten that back of our parents stands God; that he that despises them despises Him. The child that rises up against them rises up against God. If one thing appears very clearly from the history of Scripture and of experience, it is this, that God watches over the parents' authority which He has granted them with a most particular jealousy. Do not say that it was easy enough for Jesus to respect his parents as they were in every way worthy of respect. Joseph was a just and a good man, and Mary was one of the most lovable of characters. Some parents are not so; they are exceedingly trying, harsh, yea, debased, intemperate, fraudulent, brutal, so that it seems a moral impossibility to render such respect. It is indeed sad when children have parents in whom they cannot but perceive much that is revolting and despicable, and they have indeed a hard duty to perform in maintaining right feelings toward them. But let them not shrink from it; the Lord's command stands also in this case. Not even the judgment of the world will approve disrespect offered to a parent, however unworthy and debauched. It is not their personal characteristics that makes them your parents, but their relation, and that relation ever remains, and because of that relation it behooves you to respect them, give them the honor and reverence due them, which, indeed, becomes so much easier when with that relation is combined excellence and beauty of character. And where there is this inward respect, it should manifest itself in word and action. The titles by which children address their parents, the tone of voice, the expression of the countenance, and all the numberless indescribable modes in which the sentiments of the soul find their way to the surface, should bear witness of the fact that the parent is revered. Let there be no ill-mannered, overbearing form of address; always remember whom you are speaking to, — not to your equals, — and let there

be no improper rejoinder when you speak. And as you speak respectfully *to* them, also speak respectfully *of* them. If parents have defects or even vices, the child should be the last to publish it, as Ham, for instance, did when he saw his father Noah's shame. And as in speech, so in action. This is a wide subject, covering every hour that is passed under the parental roof and extending beyond even after we have left that roof.

But one particular instance do I feel constrained to mention when children must have respect to the feelings of their parents; it is when they choose their companions, especially their life's companion. Our youth is very prone to overlook this. That is wrong. It is disrespectful in the highest degree, it pours bitterness into their souls. It proves that their child has no regard for their feelings, no reverence for their judgment, no confidence in their good will. It shows on the part of the child a self-will, a want of filial affection, and even a haughtiness and an overweening sense of independence, which foreshadows nothing good when children do not consult with their parents.

A youth who acts on his own responsibility in grave and momentous matters, such as taking to himself a life's partner, selecting a profession, accepting a position, sets aside and wounds the feelings of those who are his nearest and dearest friends on earth and can never rationally expect a blessing to attend him. Seek the counsel of your parents, my dear young people, and consider their wishes and advice.

To this I would add another consideration. It not infrequently happens that children rise to a station more exalted than their parents occupied; by reason of educational advantages they become their superiors in learning and mental acquirements; or they earn more money. In consequence of this they are overtaken by a spirit of self-assertion and imagine they know more than father and mother, in every respect; they call them back numbers, old fogies, etc. Yes, they have grown so refined that they are rather ashamed of their plain and lowly parents because of their lack of gentility. Guard against such conceit and ignominious pride! Remember, your parents may not, indeed, have had the advantages of modern book knowledge, which they allowed you to acquire, but they have had from twenty to thirty more years of experience than you, and the moment you step out into life, you will discern that experience counts. Those whose hearts have become so swelled on account of a little mental attainment as to

make them self-opinionated thereby prove that they need a great deal more of solid knowledge; for plenty of true knowledge does not puff up, but makes humble. And a truly noble-minded and affectionate child, instead of being betrayed into false shame, will say: My parents may not be so refined and cultured and, as to fashion, up to date, but I know they are respectable and virtuous, and I should be a most contemptible wretch if I were to be ashamed of them in the presence of the so-called refined and fashionable; nor would I have any friends who would think less of me for their sakes or for honoring them. The first consideration, then, is respect and reverence.

The subjection of Christ to His parents included also obedience to them. At their slightest suggestion He left the Temple and the presence of the doctors and obediently went to Nazareth with them, where not the slightest symptom of disobedience ever disturbed the holy Family. The same principle, obedience, becomes our households. Specification among the thousand little items of family life is impossible. We can point out only a few requirements. The obedience which the child is required to render should be implicit. The command of the parents must be law to the child, and his feelings and inclinations, when coming in collision, must be sacrificed without hesitation and without regret. A child will often think a parent misjudges, or he may be disposed to consider the requirement hard and even cruel. He will deem the thing impracticable and foolish and wonder why he should be called upon to do a thing so much beyond his ability. It is not for him to remonstrate; the only safe and, what is more, the Scriptural way is to do what he has been told to do, and that without making much ado about it. When the parent issues his command, the child should instantly comply. There is a proneness in children, even where positive disobedience is not intended or tolerated, to put a parent's patience to the test by a sort of dilatoriness, withholding compliance as long as possible. Beware of that! It argues almost as much disrespect and selfishness as if the command were deliberately disregarded. Obedience should be prompt, instantaneous, and, withal, cheerful. My beloved, more significance than many are prone to giving it attaches to this. Examine the personal history of two-thirds of the inmates of our penitentiaries, and the incipient steps to the climax that has brought them there were taken in the nursery, at the fireside. It was at home that the young rebel first spurned authority and, going on without correction, moved on to

more daring deeds of depravity. Let the child learn to obey at home promptly, unreservedly, to fix the habit of subordination, and in every situation afterwards you will find him the advocate of order. The men that fill our pulpits, that adorn our medical and civil offices, that preside acceptably over their families, are such as were trained up to ready and uniform compliance. Thus it ought to be.

Once more recent occurrences bid me incorporate this. The obedience of the child should be rendered as conscientiously in the absence as in the presence of the parent. It is not possible for the parental eye always to be upon the child. Most of his conduct may be away from such supervision. To take advantage of the absence of a father or mother in order to throw off restraint and tread a forbidden path argues a great amount of juvenile depravity. Yet, how common is it for children to think that when the parent is not present to command or to threaten, they may disregard their counsels and violate their teachings!

Temptations are strong, companions, associates, are luring. "I promised my mother," said a young man to one who sought to entice him away into the paths of sin and shame, "that I would read the Bible and my prayer-book, worship God on the Lord's Day in the church, keep out of bad company, and never go to questionable places, and I intend to keep my promise." That young man honored his parent, a course which we commend not only to our young men, but to the other sex equally as much. Avoid the ten and thousand snares laid for the immortal souls of the unwary. Come not into the first eddies of the whirlpool of perdition which Satan has spread especially in our larger cities. Stand aloof from the wine-rooms and other kinds of rooms where father and mother would be ashamed to see you; the midnight haunts of the impure and debauched. Think of this when you are tempted and do not bring anguish upon their hearts more bitter than wormwood, grief, from which death is the only relief. Let no temptations or solicitations, no threats or scoffing permit you to violate the holy commandment that bids you honor your father and mother.

This, then, in part, is what it means to be subject unto our parents, after the pattern of our great Exemplar, the blessed Christ-child. It remains yet to be regarded why we should thus be subject. One reason, or motive, is that God requires it of us, and that certainly is the highest and most solemn of all considerations. He that sways the scepter of the universe, the Lord of lords and King

of kings, in whose favor is life and in whose displeasure is condemnation, presents Himself before every child with this special command: "Honor thy father and thy mother." You are dealing not only with that man who begot you and that delicate woman who at the sacrifice of her life gave you existence, but with the Majesty of heaven and earth, the holy and eternal Jehovah, the most high God. Look well to your ways. The pages of sacred story are filled with testimony that God issues not His commands in vain. We think of the sons of Jacob who treated their venerable parent in a manner calculated to bring down his gray hairs with sorrow to the grave. We mark the conduct of the sons of Eli, we see Absalom, David's handsome boy, suspended from the boughs of an oak between heaven and earth. Are these the only instances of Heaven's just retribution for filial disobedience and impiety? Could the history of thousands who have died in dishonor or by violence be revealed, it would unquestionably show a close relation between their filial unfaithfulness and their wretched end.

On the other hand, the divine promise is: "Honor thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise, That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth." Blessing, including health, prosperity, comfort, earthly happiness in all its varied forms, are assured to those children who obey this commandment. My beloved, one of the most precious treasures one can fall heir to in this world is a parent's blessing.

Permit me to tell the following story: In the room of a hospital, lying upon her last couch of sickness brought on by a violent accident, lies an aged woman. Extending her emaciated hand to the man weepingly standing at the bedside and calling him by name, she speaks in faltering tones: "I bid you farewell for this world. May God continue to bless you in your labors! You have always been a good and obedient son." Beloved, next to the commendation which I hope to receive on that day from my divine Master: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant," I prize nothing so highly as that dying utterance of my sainted parent. No riches of earth, no favorable comment of man, compares with it.

And so I conclude. Take pleasure in honoring your parents. Soon their venerable forms will have sunk into the grave. If conscience accuses you of sin and disrespect, hasten to heal the wounds which your conduct has inflicted, ask forgiveness of your parents and of God. Cherish them as your dearest friends, your most precious earthly treasure, your greatest honor. Thus shall it be

well with you; and the thought that you made them happy will be a source of unfailing satisfaction, even to the last hour of your pilgrimage below, and will bring down upon your head the approving smile of your Father in heaven. Amen.

Second Sunday after Epiphany.

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for it. . . . Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands as unto the Lord. — *Eph. 5, 25. 22.*

Christianity, whilst it concerns itself first and foremost with man's individual soul, also deals with the associations that spring up around him. And the most sacred, intimate, beautiful association is the relation which binds together man and woman in the inviolable and gracious bond of matrimony, or marriage. It is the first social relationship, out of which all others spring; it is the center and starting-point of human society, and it is for none to despise or underrate its importance. Throughout the entire Scriptures it is spoken of with profoundest reverence as instituted by God and in harmony with human nature. No support do those find who would extol the beauty and blessedness of single life, or hold that the highest spiritual attainments are possible only by a separation from the obligations and duties of domestic life as we have it in the celibacy of the Roman priesthood, in monkery and nunnery. Was it not in Paradise, where our first parents communed the most closely with God, that the bond of wedlock was first established? Did not our blessed Lord perform His first miracle at a marriage-feast?

But while there may be among us none who refuse to obey the Law of God in this respect from religious scruples, facts show that there is an increasing number of both sexes who avow their indifference to this social obligation. Whatever be the reason, whether it be the difficulty of maintaining a home or a selfish love of what is called freedom, whether the reason is to be found in our present social conditions or in the individual character, the manifestation is perilous and unhealthy. Not that every one is bound to marry; there are exceptions which must always be recognized, but they are exceptions. Where necessity or the sense of duty and regard for the glory of God leads one to remain solitary through life, there may be a divine blessing and greater usefulness.

St. Paul went on his way to old age and martyrdom solitary, free from all family bonds and cares, and no doubt accomplished more for Christ than if he had been like Peter and the brethren of the Lord, a man of family. But his were very peculiar and special conditions. The general rule is, God's mind and purpose is, — and the vast majority of the human race in all ages have rightly understood this wise and good design of God and followed its leading, — that man and woman be married. Thinking themselves wiser than their Creator, some may be committing a sin against society, themselves, and God by refraining from fulfilling the rightful obligations which their very existence in this world imposes upon them. Marriage is the most dignified, honorable, and helpful relationship into which any one can enter, and it ought to be the desire of every person so to be united in God's ordinance.

Passing now from the general question, we would refer in our instruction this morning to some features which may be of service to those who have already entered it, and those who anticipate that important step. Four particulars would we regard under God's blessing. In the first place we would state that it is a relationship of mutual sacredness. The Roman Catholic Church includes among its seven sacraments that of matrimony, though, strange enough, it is the very Church which imposes celibacy. And there is no question that it is one of the most solemn acts of human life. It is an act that ought to be forced upon no one; there ought to be no coercion on the part of the parents, and whatever method the state may enact, its participation merely recognizes, authorizes, and records the marriage. All ought to be left to the voluntary and cordial consent of the parties concerned. And as there is no authority to constrain this union, so there is no authority which can dissolve it. "What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder"; and no man can put those united asunder without the commission of a crime obnoxious to the Law of God and the laws of man. "Until death you do part" are the solemn words pronounced by the consecrating minister and affirmed by the contracting persons. All Scripture and the distinct words of Christ teach the sacredness of this bond, and it means moral degeneration in any country when the inviolableness of this relationship is lightly thought of or even set aside. Temptations, strong and bewitching, are multiplying on every side, and it behooves us all the more to let that commandment, given by God on stony tables on Mount Sinai, ring out in stern and unrelenting warning: "Thou shalt

not commit adultery!" Spurn all suggestions of evil, keep the soul pure, repress your lewd and licentious thoughts, and harbor them not; they are of the devil, the spirit of impurity, who hates marriage and chuckles to think that he has our legislation and our courts in his infernal grasp to break up God's ordinance. Read no literature that is suggestive; look at no pictures nor attend any plays that are such; turn from all companionships that tend to defile. Trust not your own strength, but "be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might." Then you will prevail and preserve your marriage vow indissoluble. And this is as binding upon the one as upon the other, upon the husband as well as upon the wife and upon the wife as well as upon the husband.

Again, the relationship of which we are speaking is a relationship of mutual sympathy, — using that word in its largest sense. Those who enter this binding fellowship ought to be one in the completest measure possible; for the supreme end of marriage is not simply the continuance of the human race, but the culture and development of all the noblest faculties of the intellect and the soul. Most of those sad failures in household life of which we hear, and many of which we do not hear, and of which there are far more than the outside world imagines, arise from defects in this respect. There must be harmony of thought and feeling. It is said that love is the foundation of married life. And that is true; love is essentially necessary. But what do we mean by that great and sacred word? Whence does love arise? Should not each, before entering upon a lifelong bond, in all earnestness ask, Why do I love this person? On what basis does my admiration and affection rest? Is it a matter of personal beauty, a winsome face, a pretty form, graces of manner, social position, financial standing? These have their interest and their value. But God forbid that man or woman should commit the bark of their life's happiness to any or the whole of these alone! Better not marry at all than debase that sacred tie by making it a matter of mere physical beauty or mercenary advantage. Or the cause of attraction may be equal intellectual tastes or a unity in disposition and a resemblance in character. These, too, must not be overlooked; for in wedlock not only the body, but the mind is wedded. It is of no little importance that people who are to live and talk and think together for, possibly, half a century should be able to think and talk about the same things. But above all and first of all, there must be a sympathy of the *soul*. "How," questions the

prophet, "can two walk together except they be agreed?" And that pertains primarily to that which is most needful, to religion. Husband and wife should be joined in the Lord, should be united by a common faith. A Christian, if he or she be a Christian indeed, thinks more of his or her religion than of anything else; it is their meat and drink; the very air they breathe; they live for Christ and should be willing to die for Him. How can any one be happily joined to one who is either entirely averse to such considerations or quite indifferent to them? If you wish to have domestic happiness, there is nothing so essential as a mutual regard for God's Word and His holy commandments, faith in a common Lord and our blessed Redeemer, and trust in the providence and promises of the heavenly Father. Where that is lacking, the strongest tie and the securest love is lacking. For love of the purest kind is rooted in the love of God; all interest is insignificant when compared with that which centers in a mutual hope of eternal life. It is that which knits heart to heart. It is that which strengthens in hours of weakness, gladdens in seasons of depression, comforts amid disappointments and pain, gives purpose and significance to every action of life, and makes even the thoughts of separation and death tolerable. Yes, there is no higher joy and happiness than to be one in the Lord; then marriage is sanctified and ennobled. Those who have failed in choosing such a religious life's partner we would advise to commend their matter to the Lord, who alone, by His Spirit, can touch and turn the human heart, and to seek by Christian speech and noble godly conduct to gain the irreligious spouse.

Again, we are taught that it must be a relationship of mutual honor, that is, there is to be due respect of each other's rights and position. This is a point on which our times are extremely sensitive. We are hearing much about "woman's rights," "man's superiority," "equality of the sexes," and the like, and there are those who find considerable difficulty in reconciling their minds to the exhortations which occur in the letters of St. Paul. St. Paul, they maintain, wrote as only a *man* could have written and reflects the prejudices of his age. It might, indeed, be no unprofitable employment for those who indulge in such criticisms to make themselves familiar with the blessings which Christianity has conferred upon the female sex, and especially through the teachings of the apostle. Let them compare the condition the woman occupied among the Greeks and Romans and other heathen nations

with that which she enjoys amongst us to-day and remember that the difference is owing to the influence of Christian truth; this alone ought to remove all loud speech. Instead of being his inferior, she is, by right of her union with Christ, the equal of man; "for in Christ Jesus there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." But how do you account for such a phrase as that in the text: "Wives, submit yourselves unto your husbands"? In reply we state that, while the Christian religion has given us oneness in Christ, it has not done away with the social relations and the regulations of God concerning them; thus a child and its parent are one in Christ Jesus, yet the child, according to the Fourth Commandment, is obligated to obey its parents. Now, in the relation of husband and wife, too, there are certain regulations. A wife is not a man's inferior; she is his companion, the closest friend of his bosom, his helpmate. The question is not one of inferiority or superiority. Man in some respects and in his God-appointed sphere is woman's superior; in other respects he is her inferior. Even as a woman in some respects and in her God-appointed sphere is man's superior, in other respects, however, his inferior. It is evident that in any organization or relation there must be headship for the maintenance of order and peace and to that headship becoming submission and subordination. Where there is not such headship and authority, numberless contentions would destroy harmony. This being indispensable, the only question is, Where shall the headship of decision be lodged? From many considerations and according to God's will the Bible assigns this prerogative to the man. It is a submission that springs from choice and is agreed to for the sake of propriety and the home's welfare. The wife submits herself, not as being inferior in intellect or in character, but for the good and welfare of the home. Moreover, as we look at the exhortation on the other side, see what is involved in them; how easy the subjections if they were only rightly fulfilled! Read verse 25: "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for it." The love of the man is to be so intense, so self-forgetful and self-denying, that he is prepared to sacrifice comfort, ease, life itself, for the sake of the woman, as Christ loved the Church with such intensity that He gave Himself for it, even though it involved suffering, the agony of Gethsemane and Calvary. Where there is such affection, could anything be more marvelously easy

than submission? In a rightly constituted home these disputes about superiority and preeminence would appear most absurd and ridiculous. A true wife and mother feels that she has her "rights" if she can make her home the best and happiest place for her husband and children this side of heaven, and in this her husband, if at all possessed of reason and feeling, is not going to interfere by flaunting his superiority or stinting her in her efforts. There is a relationship of mutual respect and honor, the authority of love, the submission of love; there is no imperiousness in the one nor servility in the other.

Finally, the relationship is one of mutual responsibility. This pertains to themselves and also to the family. Married life, though the most ideal state for sinful mankind to live in, is at times onerous and irksome; it calls for no little degree of thoughtfulness, delicacy of feeling, sacrifice of self, and forbearance. Times come when the very best purposes are severely tested, when whims and moods manifest themselves in both which almost exhaust patience. Not a few irritations, unpleasantnesses, and generally from the most trivial causes. Relatives or financial difficulties at times disturb the tranquillity of the home; we have known of hasty words uttered and serious quarrels started through such affairs. Now, let it be remembered that upon husband and wife rests equally the responsibility of the comfort and joy of the home. Let there be no evil insinuations, suspicious interpretations of motives, those stinging and ugly reproaches that wound like a sword. "See that ye fall not out by the way," is an exhortation that might be given to every newly married couple. And to that end there is nothing so important in your home as the one thing most needful — religion. Pray with each other and for each other. As one who knows the difficulties with which this whole subject is surrounded, I would assure you that there is nothing, absolutely nothing, that so solves the difficulties as being worshipers together of the same God and Lord and heirs together of life everlasting.

And the same holds good with respect to the household. Both husband and wife have the responsibility, the one as much as the other. Let there be no deception here, no blaming each other, no shirking. For husband and wife not to work together in the bringing up of their offspring is like two persons in a boat pulling their oars in contrary directions. To voice it in the words of that godly parent of old: "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

May God, — such is our fervent prayer, for upon the home

rests the welfare of all society, — may God grant us such Christian families, homes where husband and wife are linked in the bond of mutual fidelity, mutual affection, mutual respect, and mutual piety, to His glory, the Church's honor, and society's well-being! Amen.

Third Sunday after Epiphany.

By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith. *Heb. 11, 7.*

If you had lived in the century preceding the Deluge, or Flood, some four thousand two hundred years ago, your experience might have been somewhat like the following. Walking across a certain plain, you would have observed a man busily engaged in building a vessel 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high. After watching him for a time at his work, you might have inquired, "Sir, are you not laboring in vain? How can such an immense boat-house ever be launched? It is so far away from the sea." He would have answered, "It is my belief that the water will overflow this plain; if it comes not from the sea, the rains will bring it from heaven." "But why believe such a thing as has never yet occurred? And when will it come?" "A hundred years hence, says my God, it shall come to pass." "But you are the only one who thinks so; your neighbors have no such notion." "True, but shall their unbelief make the threatening of God of none effect, especially since it is their very unbelief which renders their destruction necessary?" Whereupon you would have passed on your way, and he would have continued at his work.

After a lapse of fifty years that man would still have been at work building that peculiar boat-house. The first story, probably, would be completed, and with a tone of skepticism you might have said to the builder: "The sky is still cloudless, all things remain as they were at the beginning; it looks as though this will prove a fruitless undertaking." He would have replied, "The Lord has spoken, and He will do it at the time appointed. Take heed lest that day come upon you as a thief!"

Another half-century elapses when, returning, you would find the ark to be finished; the door would be in the side and the window at the top. You would see it covered with pitch both

inside and outside. You would see the builder, together with the members of his household, selecting living creatures and putting them in the ark and then going in themselves. What shouts of merriment you would have heard the scoffers raise as the patriarch and his family embarked in the unwieldy vessel! What fierce contempt and derision you would have seen flashing from every eye as the old man calmly passed on his way to set foot on the ark of refuge! Once more turning a look of sympathy upon the scoffing crew, you would have heard the aged man for the last time lifting up his voice in pathetic remonstrance and affectionate expostulation, with the sad result that the laugh grew louder at his expense, impious jests flying from lip to lip as they beheld the door closing upon the "preacher of righteousness" who had presumed to denounce their sins and to interfere with their godless pleasures.

But as yet there is not the slightest token of the Flood. Nature is as fair as before. The pursuit of business is carried on as usual; the haunts of amusement and pleasure are as crowded as ever. But hark! Why pauses the merriment when it is at its loudest? Why does the man of business falter in the very midst of his traffic? Why do all faces gather blackness, and why is the voice of wild merriment changed into the cry of alarm? Look yonder, where the lightning zigzags on the troubled air! Observe how from the opened windows of heaven pours down the bursting torrent; for "the fountains of the great deep are broken up" and the floods roll in terribly upon the earth. And now, what wild wails of terror rise fearfully aloft; cries of agony and despair are heard swelling on the gale. Men run to and fro; they climb into the clefts and the tops of the rugged rocks; they scale the loftiest mountains; they contrive a thousand modes of escape, but all in vain! The waters rise higher and higher; the Flood is on. "They knew not," says our Lord, "till the Flood came and took them away." They might have known; they had been warned long enough; they had had time enough to repent of their evil ways; and every word of Noah's mouth and every stroke of his hammer as he went on year after year preparing the ark spoke in the language of entreaty and appeal to their consciences and hearts. And now, because they would not "know the things which belonged to their peace," they were "made to eat of the fruit of their own way and to be filled with their own devices." Yes, we can imagine the biting and bitter remorse. With what a piercing cry for help, with what a fearful voice of despair, they called upon Noah to

receive them into the ark! But all in vain! The ark moves farther and farther away, until it becomes a dark speck upon the horizon, leaving the wail of the perishing to sound out upon the air the funeral dirge of a doomed world. For all in whose nostrils was the breath of life died. Only Noah remained and they that were with him in the ark.

And what are the lessons we may gather from the appalling history of the Flood? For once, dear hearers, it most plainly shows that sin is exceedingly destructive. If we turn to the sixth chapter of Genesis, what a description is given of the infidelity and profligacy and impiety of the world! "The sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair, and they took them wives of all which they chose." "The earth," it is said, "was corrupt before God and filled with violence." "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every thought of the imagination of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the Lord that He had made man." "And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth." It is in such terrible words as these that God announces His determination of sweeping from off the face of the earth the men of this rebellious generation.

There is an interesting passage which is closely connected with the history of Noah. You will find it in the third chapter of the First Epistle of St. Peter, at the 18th verse: "For Christ, . . . being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit; by which also He went and preached unto the spirits in prison, which sometime were disobedient when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a-preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls, were saved by water." The interpretation of this, in harmony with the plain words of Scripture, tells us of the going of our Lord after death, before His resurrection, to the place of departed spirits and there "preaching to those spirits which had been disobedient in the days of Noah." As an example it mentions those who refused to obey Noah's voice when he called them to repentance and warned them to "flee from the wrath to come." Plainly does this passage teach that there is no purgatory after death; but particularly does it teach us what disobedience and unbelief lead to. Put it down as a never-to-be-forgotten truth that unbelief is the great and damning sin of the world. It is unbelief that locked the door of the ark upon those antediluvians

who perished; it is unbelief that locks the door of heaven upon any soul that does not repent. Men are condemned and lost, not because they have sins, for there is forgiveness for sin; "the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin," no matter how great and grievous; but not to believe that, to spurn the Son of God and His blood, to reject His offer and remedy and the provision God has made for our salvation, that is what condemns. So it was over four thousand years ago, and so it is still. What is it that says: Ye shall not surely die; God is too good to destroy the multitudes? What is it that says: There is time enough yet to attend to the soul; religion is a gloomy affair; there is no profit and use in prayer? What is it that even theoretically admits with its lips that these things may be so which Noah and the ministers preach about death and the Judgment, heaven and hell, and salvation of the soul by the merits of a crucified Redeemer, yet does not lead them to close up earnestly with these truths? It is unbelief. What is it that points with a wise mien and a significant shaking of the head, as if doubtful of their mental soundness, to Christians, to church-people, as of yore they placed their finger upon their brow and uttered strange things regarding the visionary madman, the ship-builder Noah? What is it that will even cause people to assist outwardly in the maintenance of the church, since they find it profitable to themselves and their business, to contribute toward it just as we may suppose that some aided Noah in the construction of his unique boat-house and still perished in the waves? Unbelief, sad, unpardonable unbelief, now as then.

And now mark how, in bright contrast with this picture of unbelief, comes out the portraiture of Noah: "But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord." Under the energizing power of faith, Noah built an ark to the saving of his household. It is the same divine quality that will keep a person true to the Bible and the Christian Creed against the insinuations and subtleties of infidelity and error; it is this same divine quality that will keep a person firm against the allurements and fascinations and temptations of a bewitching, deceiving, and false world. It is this divine quality of faith that knows no obstacles, regards no hindrances, staggers at no discouragements, but does what God directs us to do, not minding the results, but leaving them to Him. It is this faith that makes us strong and abiding Christians, fostering the work of the Lord, so that young and old can be abundantly

blessed with the Gospel, heeding no expenses and personal effort and time, but cheerfully rendering of our substance and talents and means. Yes, take it whichever way you wish, faith is the same effectual and powerful force now as then. Let it be our petition this evening: "Lord, increase our faith," so that ours may not be the mournful lot of those who obey not the Gospel, but rather that our names, too, may be found enrolled, like the faithful of old, in the Book of Life!

And finally your attention is directed to another scene, a scene of which the Deluge was but a type. The world which once passed under the baptism of water is reserved unto a baptism of fire. And our Lord tells us that the circumstances which preceded the Flood shall be reproduced at His second coming unto Judgment. The two events shall in many respects be parallel. "As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be in the days of the Son of Man." Sin will be rife in the world. "There shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts and saying, Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." Preachers of righteousness will again and again sound the cry of warning and alarm on the ears of the ungodly and will urge men to flee from the wrath to come; yet all to no purpose. And so will it continue until the end. The last morning shall dawn as usual. Men will be saying, "Peace and safety." The merchant will be at his ledger, the man of pleasure at his club, the woman of fashion attending to her vanity, the tradesman in his shop, and the farmer at his plow. All minds will be immersed in their accustomed cares, pleasures, and amusements, as if nothing were ever to interrupt the ordinary occupations of this life. But why do all the faces gather terror? Why is the laugh suddenly hushed upon the careless lip? Why this confusion and alarm? "The sign of the Son of Man" is seen approaching in the heavens. "Behold, the Lord cometh!" In their agony they call upon the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb!" Ah, then the souls of the impenitent shall be torn with a terrible agony as they see the people of God, those who have taken shelter in the Ark, in Him who is "a Covert from the tempest and a Refuge from the storm," entering in with their Lord to the marriage supper of the Lamb, while they themselves are shut out.

Dear hearers, the long-suffering of God is waiting. The door

of the Ark stands open. The Spirit is preaching through Bibles and ministers and Sacraments and the still, small voice of conscience. Be instructed! To-morrow the storm may have burst and the thunder-bolts descended. "*Now* is the accepted time, *now* is the day of salvation." And may you be found among that glorious company of believers who shall inherit the "new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness," and be "forever with the Lord"! Amen.

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany.

And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.

Matt. 14, 25—27.

One of the favorite spots of the Holy Land is the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. Most closely is it associated with the history of our adorable Savior. Capernaum, upon its borders, is termed His "own city"; walking by its coast, He chose His first disciples — fishermen; from a boat upon its crystal waters, which served as His pulpit, He addressed the wandering multitudes upon its shores; in a vessel on its restless waves He slept and, on awakening, spoke the sullen elements into a calm; on a grassy slope of one of the neighboring mountains He performed the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand; and probably on one of the consecrated heights He uttered those words of wisdom contained in the memorable Sermon on the Mount. It was there, too, that He met a number of His disciples after His resurrection, and after the marvelous draught of fishes he restored the fickle and impulsive Peter to the apostleship. Thus time and again does the Sea of Galilee appear in sacred story.

Like most inland lakes, this, too, is speedily disturbed by sudden gales. One moment its waters are placid like a polished mirror, reflecting the beautiful surroundings, while shortly thereafter they are suddenly dreadfully convulsed, whipped into angry and violent squalls by the cold winds that sweep down between the mountains. It is to such a disturbed scene that the text introduces us. After a day of anxiety and labor, spent in teaching His sublime doctrines, and miraculously healing the sick, and con-

cluded by the feeding of the multitude with five barley loaves and a few small fishes, the Lord had given direction to His disciples to embark and pass on to the other side, while He, though tired and exhausted, hastened away to the solitude which His soul craved. We read: "He went up into a mountain to pray." Before we proceed with the narrative, let us reflect upon that for a moment. Behold Him, climbing the rocky stairs of that great mountain altar, to spend a few hours in private devotion. Why? He needed it. It was in unrestrained intercourse with his heavenly Father that He gathered the strength and the comfort He required to perform the work that God had given Him to do. He too, could say: —

> Sweet hour of prayer, sweet hour of prayer,
> That takes me from a world of care
> And bids me at my Father's throne
> Make all my wants and wishes known.

And is there not a lesson in that for us? The disciple is not above his Master. If He needed to call upon His heavenly Father in secret devotion for strength and help, we certainly do. Let us not neglect it. The busiest of us is not as busy as was Christ. And if He felt prayer to be so essential that after the labor of the day He allowed it to consume the night, surely we are guilty of the gravest folly if we permit any consideration, social or otherwise, to rob us of the hour and the power of prayer; for "to have prayed well is to work well," was the motto of the great Reformer.

Returning to the narrative: How did the Twelve fare in the absence of their Lord? The sun, having run his course, had sunk beneath the western hills, and the sentinels of night, the moon and the stars, had appeared at their posts, reflecting their mild and silvery light in the placid waters, when — what is that? Frowningly black clouds chase one another rapidly across the sky; zigzag flashes of lightning luridly brighten the increasing darkness; chilly winds whistle down the deep ravines, lashing the water into large sheets of foaming waves, which come tumbling fast and wild against the sides of the little fisherman's boat. The billows lift it in their mighty hands like a nutshell, then press it down into the greatest depths; now and then a terrible squall breaks over the occupants, completely drenching them. Accustomed to the rudder and the oars, sturdy, weather-beaten mariners, they toil hard, but without success. Hour after hour passes slowly. Their hearts are beginning to fail them for fear. They shout to each other to sus-

tain their spirits. They recall the time when they were exposed to a similar storm; but then He, their Master, was with them on board, though asleep, and they had but to arouse Him to speak omnipotent words and calm the troubled deep. "Oh, that He were with us now!"

Though not visibly present, Jesus was not unmindful of His tried and afflicted disciples. Far off on the mountainside He was watching them. And when He sees them ready for the lessons He desires to teach them, He rises from His knees, descends the mountain slope, and, making the sea a crystal pavement, treads the four miles which lie between the shore and the troubled voyagers. It is three o'clock in the morning, the darkness intense, when there is a bright shape discernible to the startled eyes of the shipmen. A spiritlike form appears approaching upon the agitated waters, moving majestically onward. They can scarce believe their eyes. But as they gaze, it grows more evident and lifelike. "A spirit!" they cry out. The oars cease to move; their hands seem paralyzed with fright; their limbs tremble. But at this juncture a kind, familiar voice is heard: "It is I, be not afraid!" A thrill of delight passes through their frames. A sense of unutterable relief is felt by every heart. They feel safe now. Nor were they disappointed. Such is the scene presented in this Gospel account. And what are the lessons we may gather from this stirring incident?

Life, it has been said, is a voyage. With the first breath that we draw we launch out upon the main. Each in his frail bark is sailing speedily on, some more swiftly than others, but all without exception to the eternal haven beyond. During our course we encounter storms. Numerous and manifold are the waves that dash over life's boat. Thus to mention a few: There is the wave of sickness, of bodily pain, physical infirmity, and suffering, which few are spared. A violent wave it is! Then wearisome days and nights are appointed us; disease and pain bring us down to our couch and cut us off from life's activities and enjoyments. Such experience tries the temper, depresses the spirits, and is a serious shock to our life's boat. Another such boisterous wave that dashes over our life's bark is disappointment. Choose any walk in life, any relation, any condition. How entirely different the realization from the anticipation! Matters have not turned out as you once fondly thought they would. Friends have not been as true, as warm, and as disinterested as you affectionately cherished. For-

tune has been capricious. Business, office, station, has not yielded what it promised. How these things multiply as you pass from one stage of life to another! Where is the heart that has not its own bitterness? There is a skeleton in every closet; a private grief, a disappointment that we all sigh over in the secrecy of our thoughts. Or, again there is the wave of bereavement — death's cold, sullen stream as it comes tumbling over our households. What chasms it creates! What aching voids. What days and months and years of loneliness and sadness! Waves, waves of adversity, beating against life's bark! What for? we ask. Why does God thus deal with us? Let us bear in mind that it was He who sent that storm upon the Galilean sea; and He sent it for a specific and salutary purpose. Some valuable, indispensable lessons would He impart. Which? One was to impress His disciples with their helplessness. These men were experienced boatmen, ready for any emergency. They had been trained for a seafaring life from boyhood, and there was no storm they could not breast. How they discovered their weakness! History tells us that the great Napoleon, when at the height of his power and glory, had arranged to review his mighty fleet at Boulogne. Seeing a severe storm impending, the admiral in command sent word to the emperor, advising postponement. Napoleon demanded obedience to his iron will. The threatening storm burst forth, wrecking vessels and sweeping two hundred poor sailors to a watery grave. Infuriated with rage, the emperor instantly ordered a vessel and himself sprang into a large boat, crying with clenched fists: "This sea must be conquered." But scarcely had the words escaped his lips, when a tremendous wave, as if in answer, struck the boat and carried the proud monarch like a heap of dripping seaweed high on to the shore. But that is man, self-confident, self-important, conceited, disposed to cherish an overweening estimate of his ability and power, until he has been driven back upon the first principles of a truly religious life, until he becomes conscious of his weakness, his inability, impotence, and dependence. That is one reason why God permits and sends waves of adversity! Wise is he who learns this lesson.

The other lesson is this: to discover where lies their strength and reliance. Right glad were the disciples when, after hours of toil, they saw their Lord coming and heard across the crested waves the soothing words: "It is I." It is thus they found Him out, that they received enlarged conceptions of His divine character

and power, as we read in the closing verse: "Then they that were in the ship came and worshiped Him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God." Would you, my dear hearer, find Him out? In order that you may find Him out, He sends you the storms of life. How many have been brought to Christ by sorrow! How many have found the dark night of anxiety give way to a bright day of spiritual improvement and blessing to their souls! "Nearer, my God, to Thee, nearer to Thee, e'en though it be a cross that raiseth me." There are those mothers who would never so faithfully have followed the Good Shepherd had He not taken the fondly loved lamb from the domestic fold to His heavenly mansions. There are wives who never so loyally yielded themselves unto their God until, looking through their tears on the wan face and emaciated hands of the breadwinner, they sought Him who is the Helper of the fatherless and the God of the widow. There are children who were quite forgetful until they stood by a pious parent's grave and, realizing what they had lost, resolved to walk in the footsteps of their best earthly friend. There are multitudes who have never trusted in the Unchangeable One until the harrowing reverses and constant losses of earth saddened their hearts and proved that there was nothing below worthy of their soul's confidence. There are present in this assembly some who bless God for the storms of life, saying: —

My dear Jesus I'll not leave
While on earth I am abiding;
My full trust He shall receive,
Nothing from His love dividing,
Life from Him doth light receive;
My dear Jesus I'll not leave.

And in order to strengthen such faith and confession, we would regard the final incident in this instructive scene.

Peter, recognizing the voice of his Master, comprehending His comforting assurance, stepped to the side of the ship, and peering out across the waves, cried with eager tones: "Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee on the water." "Come," was the brief response, and forthwith the intrepid disciple leaped over the ship's side, and fixing his eyes on the face of Christ, paced with firm tread the surface of the sea, those on board gazing upon the wondrous spectacle with absorbing interest. Farther and farther he ventures, but there are still some steps to be taken ere he can grasp his Master's hand. The wind howled, the cold spray dashed in his face, the waves rose high, half hiding the form of Christ,

and as Peter looked round, fear stole into his heart, the watery pavement broke up beneath him, and in a moment he began to sink. Looking unto Jesus with piteous gaze and outstretched hand, he cried: "Lord, save me!" His prayer was answered. Jesus, stepping forward, caught him and in loving tones reprovingly exclaimed: "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" Again the waters became firm beneath Peter's feet as, hand in hand with his Master, he returned to the ship. The teaching that lies therein for us? Doubtless, he ought not to have been afraid, but rather with unwavering faith to have trusted in the power of Christ. Yet if we remember that Peter was a man of like passions with ourselves, the wonder is not that having walked upon the sea he doubted and began to sink, but that in such a storm he left the ship at all. So that while his faith was small, relatively it becomes great compared with ours. Yea, who is there that at his best does not see himself reflected in Peter? There is a world of strength at our command, but we must have our eyes fixed in true confidence upon the Lord. People speak of prayer, and the first thought when they take ill is the medicine bottle and the doctor. Not as if we have objection to the use of medicine and a good physician; these are precious gifts of God, but why not first of all, and with the doctor and the medicine, the prayer: "God, Thou who hast sent this affliction, let this sickness answer its purpose, *viz.,* be to my soul's welfare, and bless them, the remedy and the skill of the physician." And so with our bereavements. Instead of keeping the eye of simple faith fastened upon the Master, fully conscious of His power and His love, that "whatever God ordains is good, holy His will abideth," and confessing in Christian resignation: "It is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth unto Him good." "Thy will be done," why arraign Him before the tribunal of our puny judgment, and have our minds filled with sullenness, melancholy thoughts that border on rankest atheism and endanger our souls? What expressions one has to hear at times from the lips of professed Christians when walking on the towering billow of adversity! Safety here lies in fixing and keeping one's eyes on the divine form of the gracious Redeemer. But, you ask, will that bring back my health and strength, will that give me another position, will that bring back the dead? No. The promise is that He will not bring back the dead until the hour of Resurrection; neither has He engaged that the consumptive will be cured in this world, nor any thorn which may be torturing the festering flesh

removed; neither that yours, if a devout believer, is going to be a lucrative position. But He has promised and staked His Godship upon it that if our eyes are supremely centered on Him, He will give us what He spake upon those raging elements when He said: "Peace, be still!" There is a tranquillity of mind, a blessedness of heart, a prosperity of soul, a power to do and endure, a peace which passeth all understanding, and which this world cannot give.

Faith secures *that*. Lord, grant us that faith — that peace, till safely we enter yon harbor, where the sharp winds of adversity cease to blow, and there shall be a great calm, even the calm of undisturbed happiness and blessedness. Until then,

Wondrous Sovereign of the sea,
Jesus, Savior, pilot me.

Amen.

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany.

And they were offended in Him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honor save in his own country and in his own house.

Matt. 13, 57.

It must have been an impressive scene when Jesus stood up to deliver His first sermon in the synagog of His native city. Some time before, He had left His kindred to go to Jerusalem. During His absence He had received baptism at the hand of John and had met Satan in the wilderness, achieving a glorious victory, never before accomplished by man. In the spirit and power of a prophet He had purged the Temple at Jerusalem, ejecting from His Father's House the money-changers and dove-sellers. He had journeyed through Samaria, dispensing His miraculous favors and by His wisdom and His eloquence bringing multitudes to the truth. Returning to Galilee, He visited the scenes of His childhood and early manhood at Nazareth. "As His custom was, He went into the synagog on the Sabbath-day and stood up for to read." Then followed a short and thrilling address; His fellow-citizens could not rid themselves of the impression. It says "the eyes of all them that were in the synagog were fastened on Him." And what were the comments they offered? "Is not this Joseph's son?" Yes, they took serious offense at the contents of His address and at the arrogance, as they thought, of His pretensions and, leading Him to the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, wanted to cast Him down headlong.

After a career of successful ministry He appears a second time in the neighborhood of His early home. Again He presses upon their hearts and consciences the truth of His sayings. Again they evade its power by pointing to His former occupation. "Whence hath this Man this wisdom and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary and His brethren, James and Joses and Simon and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us? Whence, then, hath this Man all these things?" And they were offended in Him.

What was the chief circumstance which contributed to this rejection? No doubt envy, jealousy, had part in it; but chiefly it was their familiarity with the person of the prophet. He was too well known among them to receive the honor He merited and to have them accept His pretensions to be the Messiah. Not one of His townsmen comes forward to receive His benediction or to bid Him Godspeed in His glorious enterprise. Nor did our Lord alone fare thus. Other illustrations of what is here mentioned are of constant occurrence. There is hardly a period in history or a family record that does not testify to its truth; whether it be the discoverer of a new continent like Christopher Columbus, whose experience is well known to all of us, or the man of ability nowhere less regarded than in his own country and beneath his father's roof. The wonders of nature for the most are nowhere so little thought of as among those who were born and nurtured under their very shadow. Beauties and splendors that multitudes are traveling over land and sea to behold many live indifferently and carelessly amidst. Even the most precious thing in this world, religion, how valueless does it sometimes become to those who have drawn it in since their infancy! Their familiarity with it tends to make them insensible of its preciousness and power. And so, bringing home to us the sad lament of the text: "A prophet is not without honor save in his own country and in his own house," let us spend a few moments to observe, in illustration of this text, some important truths, which, from the very frequency and clearness with which they are revealed to us, we are prone to pass by with indifference and neglect.

Thus, to begin with, the effect of this familiarity is illustrated *in respect to the existence and providence of God.* That there is a God is a doctrine which is written everywhere; we may read that in the stars and on the face of the sun; we may find it painted on every flower and whispered by every wind. For any man, in his

sound and sober senses, to dispute and deny that is a monstrosity, a moral suicide. Reason and man's own consciousness readily understand and assert the existence of the Deity. And it is a teaching equally as manifest, that this God governs in and over the affairs of men; that He has not only made, but also preserves us, that He defends us against all danger, and guards and protects us from all evil. He upholds all things by the Word of his Power; ne'er a sparrow falls from the housetop, nor a single hair from our heads, but He knoweth it altogether. In Him we live and move and have our being. No Christian but assents to this doctrine. We are good theologians theoretically; we have an abhorrence of the atheism which sees no God in the universe, or of the pantheism which makes the universe God. Yet, how few are there who carry about with them a habit of realizing God, and have a sense of His nearness to us individually, whose whole lives are one constant and glowing tribute to the divine providence and governance of God, so that we even in minutest details feel and admit His care over our affairs.

To many God is, as it were, little better than an abstraction, a far-away Being, who has so much else to do that He has no opportunity to care particularly for us. Even when they pray to Him, it is as to one far, far away. We richly and daily receive His blessings; none other, we admit, bestows them upon us, yet the very multitude and frequency of the blessings we receive render us forgetful of the goodness which bestows them. Because we have grown so early and so constantly familiar with these truths, heard them repeated incessantly, imbibed them with our first breath, this familiarity has made us, or is inclined to make us, personally indifferent. They do not receive from us the honor and significance due them. It is not sufficient to say there is a God, we must learn to say and to realize "He is *my* God."

The same effect of familiarity is applicable to the *Book which God in His wonderful grace has given us.* What Christian has not the highest veneration for it, and is not ready to sing: —

> **Holy Bible, book divine,**
> **Precious treasure, thou art mine.**

It is to nearly all of us an old familiar friend, the companion of our childhood, whose praises we have ever heard sounded, and criticism against its contents is to us as blasphemy. Unlimited is our admiration for its matchless beauty and its significance for the world; all our spiritual good and immortal hopes and consola-

tions are linked with it. Here is the chart which directs our voyages on life's troubled and dangerous sea, and by which we steer in safety to the happy shores. This is the armory from which we draw all needed weapons in our Christian warfare. This is the well from which gushes out the pure, fresh waters of life and salvation, the very gulf stream of eternal life for our wilted and decaying world. Who subscribes not to these statements? And yet, how many read this precious, life-giving Volume, the benefits of which they daily experience in their homes and community? To what multitudes is it a book sealed with seven seals, by reason of their never opening its pages to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest it! They fare after the manner of the poor and aged widow in the Scottish Highlands who complained to her minister that she was in great need, that her son was in Australia, and was doing very well, but besides writing occasionally, and enclosing a little slip with a picture on it, he never was heard from. The minister asked to see the little slips he had been sending her and found that they were so many drafts for fifty dollars, which, on being cashed, netted this poor parishioner a comfortable livelihood for the remainder of her days. We have been living so constantly and so bountifully in the noonday of the Christian revelation, of Bible influence and blessings, that the Book which has produced these wonderful effects has largely lost its significance to us. And whilst admiring it theoretically, practically we withhold from it the honor and significance due. Our familiarity with it has lessened our value of it, and we receive not personally its blessings into our heart.

Continuing this line of thought, the effect of familiarity is illustrated in respect to the *central doctrine of Christianity, i. e.*, salvation by the blood of the Redeemer. There is a power in these words: "Redemption by the blood of Jesus." They reveal a mystery which even "the angels have desired to look into." The first lessons we learned were of the story of the Cross; passages such as "the Blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin." From the lips of our German-speaking mothers we were taught: —

> **Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness,**
> **My jewels are, my glorious dress.**
> **In these before my God I'll stand,**
> **When I shall enter heaven's bright land.**

Has not the frequent and ofttimes thoughtless repetition of such words caused them to become to some as a sound signifying little,

and the account of Gethsemane and Mount Calvary as a threadbare tale, from which they turn coldly and listlessly away? Is not the directness and the power with which they come home to the human bosom in its want, and wretchedness, and despair, not frequently missing? To quote the case of a poor heathen in India, to set forth the power and adaptation of this doctrine. Conscious of his guilt, feeling the wretchedness of his sin, and the religious system in which he had been educated telling him he must offer something in sacrifice, he decided to make a sacrifice of himself. He pierced his sandals with sharp iron nails, and walked for miles with the blood streaming from his feet. Still the burden tarried on his soul. Finally after many other sorts of penance, he one day drew near, faint and exhausted, to a group who were gathered round a missionary from a Christian land. He was too weak and too wretched to notice much that was going on, but suddenly the words of the speaker arrested his attention — "The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin." He paused and leaned upon his staff. His face lighted up with animation. The great demand of his soul was met. "This is just what I want, just what I want!" he cried, and threw away his implements of self-torture and laid down with cheerfulness his burden at the Cross. And his experience is not solitary.

See yon monk (you know whom I am referring to) in yonder cell in the cloister at Erfurt. He tries every device his church substitutes — fasts, vigils, masses, indulgences; he scourges his back till the blood trickles down in streamlets, and grows so faint that time and again they find him nearly lifeless on the floor of his cell. And relief? He finds none, till in the providence of God his Vicar-General John Staupitz, seeing him a walking skeleton, said to the haggard brother: "What makes you so sad, Brother Martin?" "My sins, my sins," was the reply, "I know not what to do with my sins." "Look to the wounds of Jesus and to the blood He shed for you. Cast yourself into the Redeemer's arms and trust in His sacrificial death." It was through heeding such discourses that the oppressed and sin-sick spirit received healing and deliverance. How is it with us?

To us this Savior comes, not to pluck out the nails with which we have pierced our feet or to take away the whip with which we have beaten bloody our backs. We hear it preached — the doctrine of Christ crucified; we assent to it as the great source of our salvation and hope. To how many is it not merely a doctrine in

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theology to be canvassed and discussed, not a matter of personal interest and experience. Have we that teaching? Is it the comfort and the stay of our souls? Is Christ our Hope, our One, and our All? My brethren, do we dwell upon it with such rapture as it merits; do we understand the strong emotion of the apostle when he exclaims: "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable Gift"? Who in his behavior shows his appreciation of this matchless, amazing gift? Does not familiarity with this truth render it of less significance in our eyes and hearts?

One further illustration of the indifference produced by familiarity is in respect to the doctrines of the future life, of heaven and hell. Suppose we had no knowledge of eternity; suppose that Christ had never come to "bring immortality to light"; suppose that every trace of the glorious doctrine of heaven were blotted from the earth, that as we stand at the bedside of the dying ones, or at the grave of our departed, the last sight should be the ghastliness of death and the last sound that of the earth crumbling harshly and heavily upon the casket — corruption, extinction — cheerless, eternal gloom! Suppose that now, in the midst of this ignorance and darkness, a voice was heard from heaven proclaiming: "The dead shall live again!" How that message would light up the future and thrill every soul! But how long shall they live again? Are they destined for another brief career like this? And in the midst of heaven would appear, in characters of living light, the answer: "Forever!" And yet that answer sufficeth not. The dead shall live forever, but how? What is to be the character of that eternity? Shall it open for us upon scenes of joy or woe? And once more word is flashed back: "There is a heaven and there is a hell, and abode in one or the other depends upon your personal relation to Christ, Him who is proclaimed among you, Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth, and the Life."

My dear hearers! Would any rational being give himself rest until he had complied with the condition of salvation? Would there not be hurrying to and fro and anxious concern for men to save themselves and their fellow-sinners? What is the situation? These are no new truths to us. Old are they as the Bible, familiar as the first elements of knowledge. The Christian knows that he is an heir of heaven, but he does not walk and do as if he were conscious of it. The sinner knows that he is a candidate for hell, his conscience bearing witness, but he never looks aghast at its horrors. We see in our families and in our neighborhood those

who are hastening toward the doom of the perishing. We scarcely lift a finger to hold them back; at the most an occasional prayer in a most general manner. These illustrations might be indefinitely multiplied.

We have regarded articles of doctrine, but it pertains to practical matters too. For instance, when disease or affliction has made you a long exile from the public worship of God, or you have dwelt in a community void of church privileges, with what delight you repair to His temple, whilst the constant, unceasing privileges of it have not infrequently rendered you listless and indifferent.

But to conclude. Let us take the lessons of our text earnestly to heart. How can we be preserved from the disastrous influence and dangers of familiarity? To come back to the scene of our text. When Christ came to preach in the synagog of His home, there was one there that turned not coldly away from Him. Others despised Him because they knew Him so well, but she that knew Him better than all, and loved Him as her Son and her Savior, received Him with admiration, and pondered His sayings in her heart. And so the man and the woman who know Him best, and love Him most, are the ones who receive Him most readily and will not dispense with His company; yes, the more they associate with Him in His Word and His house, the more familiar He grows with them; the more delightful does the Savior become to them. Never do they become wearied with the oft-heard name or indifferent towards His claims and doctrines. But to the contrary they pray: —

> Lord, make us to know Thee and to love Thee,
> That our delight may be in Thee and Thy precious teachings.

May that delight be ours. Amen.

Sixth Sunday after Epiphany.

Notwithstanding, lest ye should offend them, go thou to the sea and cast an hook and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money; that take and give unto them for Me and thee. — *Matt. 17, 27.*

First of all I shall explain the circumstances that connect with the account just read. Our Lord had been absent from Capernaum, which He was wont to call "His own city," for a

considerable time, and during that period the Temple-tax had fallen due. This tax is not to be confounded with the tribute paid to the Roman emperor. It was a totally different thing; it was a religious and not a civil, or governmental, assessment; it had been laid upon the Jewish nation by God Himself. In the Book of Exodus we are told that every Israelite, from twenty years old and upwards, was ordered to pay an annual fee of half a shekel, and that the sum thus raised was to be devoted to the maintenance of the Temple. The poor and the rich, all being alike equal before God, were to give precisely the same sum, neither more nor less. If the people neglected to give it, they would be liable to incur severe punishment. Such was the nature of the tax.

As stated, the Lord had been absent from the city. As soon, then, as it was reported that He had returned, the collectors presented themselves at the door of the house and, meeting His disciple Peter, asked whether his Master was wont to pay the religious tax. In doing this they were, of course, only fulfilling their duty. And yet it is quite conceivable, and their language on this occasion makes such a supposition not altogether unlikely, that as the representatives and agents of the prevailing church party they would not have been sorry to have found something, a matter of accusation, against the Prophet of Nazareth, who on this point, they thought, might hold singular notions, as on some others in which He did not agree with their leaders. Peter, deeply stung by the insinuation and feeling perfectly sure that his Master was the very last person in the world to set an example of violation of the law, answered with his usual impulsiveness: Of course He does, and then went into the house, either to bring the money or to report the matter to Jesus Himself. He was about to speak, when the Lord anticipated him with the question: "What thinkest thou, Simon, of whom do the kings of the earth take tribute or custom, of their own children or of strangers?" "Of strangers," said Simon. "Then," was the Lord's reply, "are the children free."

At once the Lord's meaning flashes upon the mind of the disciple. This assessment is for the Temple of Jehovah. I, as you, Peter, confessed not so many days ago, am the Son of the living God. On the principle, then, that earthly monarchs let their sons go free, I am exempt from a tax intended for the Temple; that Temple is My Father's house. Peter could not but feel that he had acted imprudently in giving so hasty and inconsiderate a reply to the tax-collectors. Why, then, it may be asked, did

not the Lord decline to pay the tax and state His reasons to the officials who demanded it? Because they did not know, and did not acknowledge as Peter did, that He was "the Son of the living God." Accordingly, his refusal would have been interpreted as recklessly setting aside the demand of the Law, and we may be sure they would have used it seriously to hurt His ministry and His work. In order to avoid such a risk it was that the Savior gave the direction of the text: "Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them," that is, lest we should put a stumbling-block in their way and thus unnecessarily hinder the progress of the truth and the advancement of God's cause and kingdom, we shall not insist upon our rights, but waive them, and therefore He gave direction that the half shekel should be paid, and yet paid in such a manner as to bear out the claim He had made concerning Himself. Peter was to take a hook and bait it and cast it into the lake; the first fish that swallowed the bait would have in its mouth, or sticking in its gills, a stater, a coin equivalent to a whole shekel, sufficient to pay the usual tax for two persons. With this stater the demand of the collectors would be satisfied. "Give unto them," He tells His disciple, "for Me and thee."

The question has been raised: Why did our Savior resort to this miracle, the only one of its kind performed by Him? We cannot suppose that it was from poverty, that so trifling a sum could not have been found in the house; for Peter seems to have been a man in comfortable circumstances. And even in such a case the money could easily have been borrowed from friends or neighbors. Besides, this is the only miracle on record that He wrought for His own advantage, a thing He otherwise refused to do. No; our Lord, as already indicated, had a higher and grander purpose in view, namely, to deepen in the mind of Peter and his fellow-apostles the great central truth of His godship. It would have perplexed them not a little if their Master, whom they had just recently confessed to be the Son of God, would have paid the Temple-tax, as if He were not the Son of God. Such compliance would have been obviously inconsistent with His claims. But when He paid the tax under protest, as it were, a protest which they at least understood, part of the difficulty was removed, and the remainder entirely disappeared when He backed up the protest by a miracle so striking and remarkable. Having explained the particulars, let us draw two lessons from what we have heard: the first one, on doctrine; the second, on conduct.

It has become the custom to speak of Jesus Christ in terms of highest admiration and praise. Regardless of creed or shades of opinion, people will extol the singular purity in Christ's character, His gentleness and graciousness of demeanor, His kindness, patience, and forbearance, His devoted and disinterested life, the heroic spirit in which He met His death. He is spoken of as "the greatest Hebrew," yes, as the greatest man who has ever appeared in the history of the world. He was a great Reformer, a great religious Teacher, a profound moral Philosopher and Philanthropist, to whom the human race is vastly, yea, immeasurably indebted. He inspired, stimulated, and directed the moral progress of mankind as none other. These are a few of the expressions to be found on the lips of persons who are as far remote from Christianity as the east is from the west. Our Lord was once buried in a rock tomb; He is in danger now of being buried in a grave of flowers, beautiful and fragrant flowers of speech, as we heard, but secretly sprinkled with deadly poison. And the appeal is, Are we willing thus tamely to surrender Him? A question than which none is of greater vital importance, upon which turns the eternal destiny of each one of us, is, "What think ye of Christ?" Not simply, What think ye of God? Many among those who have their thoughts about God do not believe that He ever had a Son, that Christ is the Only-begotten of the Father. Nor is the question this, What think ye of religion? There are those who are religiously inclined and have some form of religion of their own. The people of Athens, Paul tells us, were very religious; but they called him a babbler and ridiculed the story of Christ's godship and resurrection. And there are those who deck themselves with a Christian name and have beautiful temples in which they worship; and yet Jesus is to them a different personality than the Christ, and they have radically wrong conceptions regarding Him. But whatever others may hold, the specific question is, "What think *ye* of Christ?" We have just confessed in the Apostles' Creed: "I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord." What do those words mean to us? Do they mean what we express in that other Creed, the Nicene, that He is the "only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, very God of very God, . . . being of one substance with the Father"?

This, to return to the account, is what Jesus claimed for Himself. His conversation with Peter has no meaning at all if it does not express this, that, being the Son of God, He had a right

to be exempted from the assessment for the maintenance of the house of God. And as here, so throughout. He affirmed: "I and My Father are one," and that he who has seen Him has seen the Father. When Peter confessed Him as the "Son of the living God," He did not say, Peter, thou art grossly mistaken. And when placed under oath by the high priest: "I adjure thee by the living God that Thou tell us whether Thou be the Christ, the Son of God," He calmly rejoined: "Thou hast said." Now, these claims are either true or false. If they are true, then He was what He professed to be, both human and divine; but if they are not true, then He was not only not God incarnate, but not what many who are non-Christians extol Him to be. Then He was not a *good* man, for He did not speak the truth; worse, then He was an impostor, a cheat, a base hypocrite, the boldest and most unscrupulous blasphemer that ever trod the earth, a man unworthy of the least consideration. What means this insincere praising of Christ? We must accept Him according to His claims as "God manifest in the flesh" or utterly reject Him. But did He not sustain His claim?

We turn to the story. Peter was met by the collectors outside of the house; he conversed with them there. The Lord all the while was in the house. When Peter entered, the Lord, before he uttered a word, asked him a question bearing on what had passed between the disciple and the collectors. What is this but a proof of omniscience? And what is omniscience but an attribute of God? Again, He directs the apostle to go and catch a fish for the purpose specified. No one would know better than Peter, an experienced fisherman, the extreme improbability that what the Lord had predicted would actually come to pass. It was plainly a miracle. And who can perform miracles but God alone? Another proof of Christ's deity. Even as the winds and the sea did His bidding, so the creatures that inhabited the sea, at His almighty call, had to minister to Him. "What think ye of Christ?" There is only one answer that will unlock the mystery of His person and explain the majesty of His work, and that answer is simply and beautifully rendered in our Catechism: "I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord." So let us regard Him, bow before Him, give Him the tribute of our heart, our love and service. That is the first and the main lesson.

In the second place, we have in this narrative a valuable lesson bearing on life. As we heard, Christ as the Son of God had a right to claim exemption from the dues collected for the house of God; but He chose to waive that right in the present case and did so for the sake of others, lest He should cause them to stumble. Here you have the illustration of a principle as much applicable now as in the time of the Savior and His apostles. God's rights must never be given up; when He has declared a thing to be sin, our course is perfectly plain; we must not deviate even a hair's breadth from His directions, His Word. But while we must never give up God's rights, we may safely sometimes give up our own. We may have a perfect right to do a certain thing, which, however, owing to other considerations, we ought not to do. For the Christian the exercise of a right is conditioned by love. If in any case it will grieve a brother or cause him to stumble, then it is our privilege, and that is a higher thing than duty, to waive what we have a right to do, in order that our brother be kept from suffering or from sinning. Of course, the principle has its limits and must not be abused by the brother; but such is the principle. To quote an example or two. In matters of church, it is altogether indifferent in itself whether we use the wafer or break the bread in the Lord's Supper, whether we use red or white wine; it is altogether immaterial whether the minister wears a robe, a cassock, whether there is a crucifix on the altar or not; and before we would allow such matters to hinder church-membership, we would discard them one and all, the wafer, the cassock, the silver crucifix. There are no divine rules in those things; and if men had acted on that principle, many controversies and quarrels might have been prevented. To mention another sphere — amusement. Abstractly I may have a perfect right, as between myself and God, to amuse myself in a certain way; but if acting on that right will be so construed by others as to encourage them to do things sinful or seem to them to be giving countenance, on my part, to evil, it is better for me to waive my right than to work mischief by insisting on the exercise of my right. Thus, to specify, I have a perfect right to attend a baseball game in a public park on a Sunday afternoon. Having attended worship in the morning and contemplating doing so in the evening, why should I not go out for my recreation? And yet, it is glaringly apparent that Sunday desecration is one of the evils of our day, and if my presence may tend to the breaking down of the sanctity of the day, the

neglecting of worship on the part of others, with such a feeling it behooves me to waive my right, as our Lord did here. The same pertains to the family and to every other sphere. When a member of a household insists upon an undoubted right, even though he knows he is causing feeling and sorrow, then he is sacrificing love to self. The conduct of the Savior may therefore be profitably commended to his study and imitation. It may, indeed, like everything else, be abused (of that we are not now speaking), but such a principle exists. As Luther expresses it: "The Christian, through knowledge and faith, becomes free from all men, but through love is made the servant of all"; that means: Where there is Christian love, there is the subordination of personal preferences in order to be of service to others.

The application of this must be made by each one to himself. How such application would promote peace, help to remove friction, heart-burnings, mistakes, and sorrows! How it would minister to holiness, make life nobler, more truly happy, and a blessing to others! Leaving you to think further upon this text, the 27th verse of the 17th chapter of Matthew, may the Spirit of God help you to make wise and due application! Bearing in mind its chief instruction, we conclude: —

Beautiful Savior, King of Creation,
Son of God and Son of Man!
Truly I'd love Thee,
Truly I'd serve Thee,
Light of my soul, my Joy, my Crown.

Amen.

Septuagesima Sunday.

I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. — *2 Tim. 4, 7.*

The great apostle who penned these words was nearing his end. Yet a few more days and his head, which had grown silver with age and, still more, with labor, much suffering, and care, would be smitten off by the sword of the executioner. With most of us death is surrounded with great uncertainties. What day's sun will light us to our graves, what disease will be commissioned to smite us low, where and under what circumstances we shall lie down and take our last breath, are particulars left for us in darkness. With

the apostle, except a miracle be wrought on his behalf, there was not the smallest hope that he should escape out of the hands of that tyrant monster of cruelty and blood, Emperor Nero, at whose tribunal he had been condemned in the city of Rome. Now, there is something profoundly solemn in the spectacle of a person who is brought sharply face to face with his departure from this world. He has a past; he has a future; how will he look at these? Whatever he may do, that past cannot be ignored, it cannot be waved aside; it follows us, clings to us, with desperate grasp, trails behind us with increasing age, and the survey of it is either frowning or joyful. With the man who wrote the words of our text it was joyful. As he lay in his Roman dungeon, knowing that the next time he passed through its heavy door it would be to martyrdom, and as his eye scanned in reminiscence the thirty years he had spent as ambassador of that Lord for whose cause he was now ready to be offered, thinking of himself as a wrestler on the arena of the world, he said: "I have fought a good fight"; again, thinking of himself as a racer, he remarks: "I have finished my course"; and regarding himself as a guardian, a custodian, of the truth, he exclaims: "I have kept [kept safe] the faith." Then turning the eye of his soul from the past to the future, knowing full well that the future can contain no evil for him, since the past does not reproach him, he utters the thrilling words: "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day."

My beloved hearers, we have the same ground to stand upon and to say at the last with confidence and joy: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." Let us consider in our present devotion what this means. It is clear that the apostle, when he penned those words, felt that there was a faith to keep. But mark well, he does not say that he had kept faith, or that he had kept some faith, but that he kept or guarded "*the* faith." He was fond of that expression, "*the* faith." He frequently used it. He exhorts his fellow-Christians to "stand fast in the faith," to "be sound in the faith," to examine themselves whether they are "in the faith." In one place, speaking of the evils connected with seeking to be rich, he says that many who had been inflamed with this unhallowed passion have "erred from the faith." In his first letter to Timothy he states that one of the signs of the last and degenerate times is that some will "depart from the faith." Accordingly, in the apostle's mind "the faith" is

something distinct and unambiguous: a system of truth to which all Christians must hold fast and in which they must be sound; it is something which is not to be confounded with any other thing. If it be something from which a man can depart and err, and which he can deny, then it must be capable of a definite statement, of a specific definition of truth and error.

At the present day we hear much of Paul's theology, of Peter's theology, of John's theology, as if they had a different faith from the rest. It has become a very common phrase in religious publications: This is Pauline, that Petrine, that Johannean; yea, there are those who go so far as to maintain that this or that doctrine is not Christ's, but Paul's; Jesus did not teach it, but Paul did. As if the great apostle had forgotten whose ambassador he was and had sunk into the invention of messages of his own! Shameful distinction! One who studies the character of the apostle will at once become impressed with the fact that he was far from being enamored of anything which was simply his own. His desire was to win Christ, that he might not have his own righteousness, but the righteousness which is of God by faith. He would cast away his every possession, his family honor, his pharisaic bigotry and zealotry, his social standing, in fact, all the rags of his own, as he styles them; and those people would make us believe that he had and taught notions of his own, claiming for them the same authority and the same obedience as for the teachings of his divine Master. Tremendous accusation, from which he would have recoiled as from a scorpion. He had "fought a good fight," but it was a conflict which had been assigned him by Christ. He had "finished his course," but the course had been fixed by Christ. He had "kept the faith," but the truth had been taught him by Christ. He had not invented his teachings nor deduced them; he had not accepted them from any human lips; they had been committed to him. And that specific, distinct faith he had kept and guarded. To mention a few of its outstanding articles. There is the teaching that the carnal mind and heart of the natural man is enmity against God; he had kept this; that man's, the sinner's, condition is utterly hopeless, deserving God's wrath and displeasure, temporal death, and eternal condemnation; he had kept this; that there is redemption alone and solely in the infinite love of God as displayed in the Cross, the sacrifice of the Savior; he had kept this; that we are called by the Holy Ghost through the Gospel, enlightened with His gifts, sanctified and kept by Him in the one true faith;

he had taught this. And so with all the doctrines found in his letters, divinely imparted and taught by him. Of none of these was he the source, for none of them the authority; they were his Lord's, and he had "kept" them.

And this — you will permit the digression — is a matter of present-day importance. The atmosphere of our times is filled with a decided dislike for what is termed confessionalism. Individuals and churches, it is contended, must be "liberal" and "broad." This means with most people that there must be no positive convictions along doctrinal lines. This adverseness centers itself especially against the word "creeds." It has become a slogan: "No creeds, but Christ!" Many there are who look upon creeds as the product of minds that had a fondness for speculation; they associate them with the fossils of dead orthodoxy and petrified Christianity. It is an inglorious mistake that is leading churches into the mire of liberalism, indifferentism, and infidelity. The fact is that each one of these creeds of Christendom marks an important epoch in the church's experience of religious truths. When our Lord was about to leave His disciples, they were filled with sorrow because they did not know who should teach and lead them. The Lord then gave them the promise of the Holy Ghost, who was to guide them into all truth. Each one of our confessions marks a fulfilment of this promise. There is the Apostles' Creed, a confessional formula recited each Lord's day, which represents the Gospel in a nutshell, and which was needed as a bulwark against the influence of false teachers, such as the Gnostics. A confession a little more theological in character is the Nicene Creed. It was not as a result of fond speculation, but in response to a deep need in the Church that it came into existence. The doctrine of the divinity of our Lord and Savior was seriously at stake; for Arius, a man with a great folly, taught that Christ was not coeternal with the Father, but had been created in time, that, after all, He was only a creature of God. But how can a created being, even if superior to his fellow-creatures, save man from guilt and the curse of sin? Here the controversy began, involving the very core of true religion. To combat this false doctrine effectually, the Nicene Creed was adopted. Thus, too, it was at the time of the Lutheran Reformation. Another great question came to the foreground: What shall I do to be saved? On the one side was all that we to-day understand by Romanism, the source of all

the evils and abuses the Church had been suffering for ages. Against its system of work-righteousness the Scriptural doctrine of God's free grace in Christ Jesus and His work of atonement had to be confessed. This was done by Luther and others who adhered to him. The best exposition of this Scriptural doctrine we have in the Augsburg Confession, delivered at Augsburg before the Emperor, which is a clear presentation of what the Scriptures teach. The same holds true with regard to Luther's Catechism and the other confessional writings of our Church. They grew out of an inner necessity; they are the very life of the Church of Christ; and the time may come when in view of the assaults of all this new theology upon the Bible the Church will be called upon to formulate a new confession covering the points in controversy. Not as if we regard in any sense the confessions to be equal to the Scriptures; the Bible is our only and the absolute source of truth. The creeds, or confessions, are only witnesses, expressions of what the Church believes to be the meaning of the Scriptures over against those who oppose them. Why, then, this agitation as if they were against Scripture? No, after careful examination we can truthfully and with sincere conviction state that the confessional writings of our Lutheran Church are the noblest presentation of the Scriptural faith, a distinct, unambiguous system of truth, something definite, and our wish is that each and all of you might share this same conviction and *keep it.* This leads us to another thought.

St. Paul's confident and rejoicing avowal that he had "kept the faith" suggests the strenuousness with which he had guarded it. The first expression, "fought," is taken from the Grecian sport of wrestling, in which every nerve and muscle is put to the utmost tension, and the antagonists grapple in desperate effort to bring the adversary to the ground. So, says the apostle, have I wrestled a good wrestle. Again, he writes, to convey the same idea of energy expended: "I have finished my course," or race, even as those nimble athletic young men did who in those Olympian games would speed forward from the starting-point across the stadium to obtain the triumphal wreath that crowned the winner. And so the third figure he employs connects with the same tenacity and firmness of purpose and endurance. He might have said, and truly so: "The faith has kept me"; for these are mutually dependent and reciprocal truths. The man keeps the faith, and that faith keeps that man. But the truth now before us is that the man had kept

the faith. Think not that it was an easy thing for an apostle to keep the faith. True, he was an inspired man, but he was a man. And we must not suppose that his mind, great intellect that he was, was not liable to influences by which his hold of the truth might be weakened or, if not weakened, sorely tested. When he encountered, as he must often have encountered, the profound and subtle philosophers of his day in all the great centers of education, in Athens, in Corinth, in Ephesus, and in Rome; and when they debated with him on the tremendous moral problems of the world, problems then and problems still, think you that his spirit was not appalled in view of those dark, impenetrable clouds? But he "kept the faith." When he was alone, think of it, alone in the midst of that vast heathen world, alone in the presence of temples and idols and the seething corruptions of idolatry, consecrated by ages and sanctioned by rank and fashion and power; think you that he experienced not the sensation that comes over a man when he seems to stand alone? But still he "kept the faith." When, too, alas! not an uncommon thing, with him, helpers ceased to help and companions forsook him, having loved this present world, and churches, once his pride and joy, became divided into factions and disfigured by vices, like the church at Corinth, or seduced by a mischievous Judaism, like the churches of Galatia, think you that all this did not make the apostle sick at heart?

No, to repeat it, it was not an easy thing to keep the faith, as little as it is an easy thing for the pilot to keep the helm in hand when the wind roars around the vessel, and the breakers sweep in foaming masses over the deck; and yet this is easier than it was for the apostle to "keep the faith." Yet he kept it. How he kept it he does not tell us here; but here and there in his writings we catch glimpses of the secret of his power. He kept it on his knees, he kept it when he prayed night and day with tears. And the same experience will be ours. It is not an easy matter to keep the faith. It will be tested by that corrupt and deceitful heart within us; it will be tested by the temptations of the world around us, by its customs, diversions, bewitching and delusive; it will be tested by the promises of advantage if only we will be faithless in our profession, not too strict and intolerant, yielding a little here and there; it will be tested by the strange happenings of Providence, which at times bewilder the strongest minds and make their feet almost slip; it will be tested by the indifference and lukewarmness of those around us.

Happy he who brings his faith through all these things! He is like a safe that guards its treasure unhurt amid the flames which have raged around it in vain. And why had the apostle so strenuously guarded the faith? Because he recognized and realized the preciousness of it. It was now thirty years since that miraculous occurrence on the road to Damascus, when the Lord arrested his mad career, and he entered upon that contest, that race, that guardianship. He had given up much in so doing — honor, wealth, fame, office. He had been called upon to suffer peril, toil, persecution, poverty. He was frequently in actual want; he had no home, but was a solitary traveler; dangers he had passed through by land and by sea, shipwreck, public scourgings, receiving time and again forty stripes save one; persecutions he had suffered without number, sometimes fleeing for his life; he had been stoned till he was supposed to be dead. Mention of this reproach and abuse we have in his writings and in the Acts of the Apostles. Yet it grieved him not that he had identified himself with the despised followers of the Nazarene. There is no expression of sorrow that he had closed in with the faith; on the contrary, what a triumphant note sounds from this text! His brow lights up as his eye catches a glimpse of the crown waiting to adorn his brow. "I am ready," he exults, "ready." How different, immeasurably different, this from the life of those who had no conviction in their best days and have none as they lie on a bed of pain, their last illness; who have exhausted their powers to gain this world, but have put forth no efforts for the world to come; who may be possessed of this earth's goods, but have no treasure laid up in heaven; who may have been wise counselors, statesmen, educators, but not "wise unto salvation."

My beloved, we possess "the faith," the same true and unmistakable teaching of Christianity, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which was committed to the hands of the great apostle. In the creeds of our Church, the denomination with the clearest, fullest, and most thoroughly indicated of all Christian confessions, it has been set before us; it is the faith that we have avowed in confirmation; Sunday after Sunday we hear it in pulpit ministration and at our altars. If it is worth anything, it is worth everything. And you and I will ere long be in the situation that Paul was when he penned those words. What then? What then? Oh! for the glorious prospect, the comfort, that shall atone for all that we may

have endured, sacrificed, forfeited, when, amid fading vision and failing heart, and the tears and sobs of those who watch us in our last struggle, we shall be able to say: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness." Amen.

Sexagesima Sunday.

Let the words of Christ dwell in you richly, in all wisdom. — *Col. 3, 16.*

A truly wonderful and most valuable treasure which the all-wise and gracious God has bestowed upon men is the Bible. It contains everything that would make us happy, here in time and hereafter in eternity. It contains the one grand recipe and prescription how sinful man, fallen away from his God, may be reconciled; the plan of salvation through a divine Redeemer. It contains the secret of true living; how the creature may acceptably serve the Creator. It contains the key to heaven; the title-deed for an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. It is a pearl of great price, so precious and enriching that no mind can conceive, and no tongue can adequately set forth, its value.

But as with some other treasure, although it is there, its importance and valuable contents may nevertheless not be recognized. It was so with that large Volume that lay securely fastened, bound by a chain, to the walls of the library in the University at Erfurt. No one ever suspected that amid the thousands of quartos and folios that were around, there was anything specially remarkable about this Book, till one day a student from Eisleben, by the name of Luther, who attended the university, turned over its large pages and stumbled over its lost doctrines, the teaching of which revolutionized succeeding centuries.

And yonder Bible in the archives at Erfurt is not the only one that has shared that fate. Every person here present, without question, has a copy of the Bible in some form. One possesses it in large and lucid type, tastefully bound, embellished with splendid illustrations and supplied with helps; another displays with no little pride the identical copy, well thumbed, its passages marked and lined, which some pious parent or ancestor used during the days of earthly pilgrimage and handed down as a sacred heirloom.

Some who are attending this service have it in varieties of ancient speech, the Greek and Hebrew originals, or in English or German. But whatever be its form and mechanical make-up, if it but adorns our parlors and shelves, while its goodly contents are not extracted, of what use is it to those who possess it?

It is related of a traveler who one day stopped at the door of a cottage to ask for a drink of water that he found the parents quarreling and cursing, the children standing affrighted around, and everything bore the marks of demoralization. The stranger spoke kindly to the inmates and asked why they made their home so miserable. They offered the usual excuses, one blaming it on the other. While drinking the cup of water, the traveler happened to see a dust-covered Bible on a shelf. Without giving them a clew to his meaning, he said in a low tone, as if confiding a great secret to them: "There is a precious treasure hid in your house; if you can find it, you do not know how much it will help you." Having said this, he left. At first the cottagers thought it a jest, but after a while they searched, fruitlessly, until one day the woman came across the neglected Bible and read, written in her sainted mother's hand: "The Law of Thy mouth is dearer unto me than thousands of gold and silver." "This is the treasure!" she exclaimed. "Thank God, I have found it!" And a treasure it proved, the spring of happiness and salvation to her soul and the members of her family, the source of peace and harmony to her home.

This Sunday, in the course of the church-year, is set apart for our inspection of that treasure and the setting forth of its value. Let us, then, devoutly attend to the line of our text, observing —

1. *What the apostle means when he exhorts that the words of Christ should dwell in us richly;*
2. *What will be the blessed results of following this exhortation.*

1.

When the apostle speaks of "the words of Christ," he does not simply mean the words which Christ Himself spoke with His own divine lips when on earth, but all that is contained in the inspired Word of Revelation. It matters not who held the pen, whether Moses in the land of Midian, David in the mountains of Israel, Daniel in the palaces of Babylon, Paul, a prisoner at Rome, or John amid the bleak rocks of the Isle of Patmos; they all

wrote by the same Spirit and inspiration concerning Him. To quote His own words: "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no man cometh unto the Father but by Me." He is the beginning and the End, the Sum and the Substance, the Kernel, the All-in-all of the entire Volume, from Genesis to Revelation. Thus the Bible is "the Word of Christ"; and that we are to let dwell in us richly. The expression is significant. To dwell is to take up one's abode and ordinarily and almost constantly to live in a certain place, to be settled there. So the Word of Christ is to be settled in you; it is not to be a stranger or a casual visitor or guest, but an inmate, as familiar and as well known to you as the persons who dwell under the same roof and pass their whole existence with you. It is to have its home in us. And when, we question, does the Word of Christ so dwell in us?

In the first place, when we are thoroughly acquainted with it. To sit at the window and see the passengers on the street filing by, occasionally doffing their hats at you, does not yet make them your friends and family members. Unless you close in with the Word of Christ as it is taught and preached to you, it is merely doffing its hat to you and will never dwell in you. Not as if I wished to advocate memorizing the many chapters and texts of the Bible, however excellent that would be. I know full well that such a demand would from the very beginning deter most of those who make up this assembly. What I recommend to you is to commit to memory a few Scripture-passages, such as the text of this morning, and have them imprinted on your memory and by God's grace fixed in your heart, so that you will never forget them.

A few weeks ago there came from a distant shore a man who set all the country agog with a formula that they were to say to themselves in the effort toward bodily health and composure. "Every day, in every way, I am getting better and better." But why not, instead of that flat and insipid, materialistic and atheistic formula, a verse from the Bible? We ought to have, suited to our condition and situation, at our tongue's tip a number of texts, so familiar to us that we can recall them at any moment, so present to our minds as if they were a part of ourselves, not requiring an effort when wanted, but as well known as the expressions with which we meet one another in the morning and part again at night. Then are they inmates, dwellers, as the text calls them; and if this is regularly and conscientiously done, memorizing and turning over in one's mind ten or twelve passages, plainly understood, and

embracing the great truths of the Christian religion, in respect to faith and in respect to living, you will possess a treasure compared with which all your investments in bonds and certificates, bank notes and deeds, are exceedingly trivial.

But there must not be only the mere acquaintance with the Word of Christ, but the turning over in our minds and thoughts. Besides acquaintance with it there must be meditation, reflection, pondering; otherwise it will be just like food that is eaten, but not assimilated. It is this particular that our blessed Savior dwells upon with such emphasis in the Gospel-lesson of this Sunday, when He speaks of the seed that fell by the wayside, was trodden down and devoured by the fowls of the air. It is indeed startling, shocking, how many idle, vacant, listless listeners there are in God's house when the seed is sown, what sluggishness of mind, inattention, and lack of reflection characterize so many who sit under the pulpit. It sounds almost incredible, but it is the actual confession of a dying, despairing man, addressed to one whose sermons he had heard for twenty years: "I have never heard a single sermon!" The minister startled, believing it to be words spoken in delirium. "No," said the man, "not at all. I attended church, but my habit was, as soon as you began the sermon, to begin a review of the previous week's trade and to arrange the business of the next." In like manner, though, we hope, to a lesser extent, Satan deals with thousands who occupy pews in the church. He distracts their attention to some unworthy object, to play with their finery, to carry away their minds to outside scenes of occupation and pleasure, thus, alas! destroying souls, not in his devilish haunts, but in the very house of God, and causing the sermons that were meant for their salvation to rise up on the Day of Judgment in condemnation. Lord, preserve every hearer from such a doom!

No, not so would we attend to the "Word of Christ," but in good and honest hearts keep it, reflect upon it, let it dwell in us. When you listen to a sermon or read the holy Volume, let it be attended by thoughtfulness, personal reflection. It is this purpose which silent prayer is intended to serve, when, as you enter the sanctuary, you bow your head for a few moments and invoke Heaven's aid in words such as these: —

Lord, open Thou my heart to hear
And by Thy Word to me draw near;
Let me Thy Word still pure retain,
Let me Thy child and heir remain.

And when the service is over and you return home, text, exposition, hymns, and prayers should all be forgotten? Never thus shall we conform with the apostle's direction: "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you," and he adds: "richly," plentifully, abundantly, in a full and adequate measure. One of the characteristics of God's people has ever been just this. Says the psalmist: "In Thy Law do I meditate day and night."

Not a single day should ever pass without thought of some passage from God's Word. You ought to regard it just as necessary as your food and your clothing, and you do not go without that for a single day. It will not do to say: "I have no time to read, no time to give a single thought to sacred matters." It is not wise, it is not right. You must take time. You must not permit the devil's slogan "No time!" to interfere with your duties toward God and the things that make for your soul's welfare. Have less of the newspaper or literature on other subjects, less time for your person, for other duties, or even less of sleep if need be, but never neglect God's Word for the things of this life. Let it sink into your understanding, permeate your system, control your thinking, reasoning, judging, become a part of yourselves. That is what it means to "let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly."

2.

And what are some of the blessed results? For one, it will make us what we ought to be, decided, stable Christians. It will give us doctrinal soundness, firmness and strength of conviction. We are living at a time when false teaching of every kind is continually set before us in the most subtle and alluring forms. There is no end of religious opinions published in the public press; it is cast abroad in pamphlets, circulars, public addresses and all sorts of devices. And there are those who regard it as a sign of up-to-date wisdom and fair-mindedness to give such religious opinions a hearing and to call those bigoted who refuse to do so. But, my beloved, how does a teller or cashier of a bank best qualify himself to judge counterfeits? Is it necessary that he make himself familiar with every method of forgery which every rogue in the land may engrave and circulate? What he is chiefly concerned about for the safety of his own bank is to know well his own marks, signatures, and numbers; if he knows them, he will be able to detect the spurious notes and coins at a glance. Or if the weights and measures of

a man's business are questioned, the merchant does not run through the streets of the city to compare them with every other merchants' measures or scales. There is a city standard established by authority, and an appeal to that ends all controversy. So it is with religion. "To the Law and to the Testimony," says the prophet; "if they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them." It is not necessary that you should acquaint yourselves with every heresy in order to detect and expose it. What is necessary is to be well versed in the Word of Christ; let that dwell in you richly, and then, if called upon, you will be ready to judge. A person who has learned and assimilated the single passage: "The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin," can never be a Christian Scientist, who denies sin and ridicules as "puerile" the conception that the literal blood of Christ trickling from the cross has the power to atone for the sins of men. A person who has learned and assimilated the passage: "These [those at the left hand of Christ] shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal," cannot be a Russellite, who tries to explain away that "everlasting." The person who has learned and assimilated the passage: "Thou shalt worship the Lord, thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve," can never be a Romanist, who renders divine homage and worship to the Virgin Mary and to a host of saints. It is ignorance of the Bible that is the root of all error; it is the superficial acquaintance with it that accounts for most of the sad perversions and defections of the present day. In almost every case the downward course begins when the Bible has been laid aside, when attention to its teachings has been neglected. Then the floodgates are open for any kind of heresy, and the strange feature is that such a one falls into the hands of those who boast that they show men the light according to the very Book he has previously so neglected, though constantly admonished not to do so. Safety, soundness, firmness of conviction — that is one result of letting the Word of Christ dwell in you richly.

Another is its sustaining, sanctifying power. A neglected Bible, as it means an unstable religion, means also a lean soul, a barren, decaying, spiritual life. To read and to know the Bible is to fit a man to meet four-square the duties of life, to quit himself as a Christian, giving him power to resist its temptations and shoulder its responsibilities. As it is the power of God unto salva-

tion, so it is the power of God to a consistent, noble character and conduct. It is that which keeps us up, supplies the motive force and encouragement to do and to dare. How little we would be disposed to undertake at times if it were not for the consideration: "God wills it, directs it; that settles it." Or again: "He wills it not, He forbids it; and that settles it." And so when it comes to life's reverses and adversities. "The Bible," writes one, in whom the Word of Christ dwelt richly, "has been my guide in perplexity and my comfort in trouble. It has roused me when declining and cheered me in distress. Other writings may be good, but they lack certainty and force. The Bible carries its own credentials along with it and proves that it is spirit and life to the soul." Beloved, can you add your testimony to that? Have you, are you, getting the same good out of it? Is it your comfort in trouble, your guide in perplexity? Is it your spirit's food, from which you get strength and vitality? Do you realize its force in respect to your conduct and character? When tempted, are you, like your Lord, ready to quench the fiery darts of the Wicked One with an "It is written" or "Thou shalt not"?

And looking forward to the final moment. Do you confidently say: "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me"? Words like these from the 23d Psalm will bear up your pilgrim spirit, give strength to your arm, tonic for your faintness, medicine for your disease.

To conclude. How is it with your reading of the Bible, your pondering of the texts? Does Christ's Word dwell in you? Or are you more taken up with the opinions of men as you daily absorb them from all kinds of publications? My dear hearers, I appeal to you in the name of Him who has said: "Search the Scriptures," and of His apostle who directs us: "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly," cherish a deeper appreciation of this heavenly treasure. May God, through His Holy Spirit, make you diligent in hearing and learning it! Clasping it firmly to your bosoms, may your confession be: —

Holy Bible, Book Divine,
Precious treasure, thou art mine!

Amen.

Quinquagesima Sunday.

Then came the Day of Unleavened Bread, when the passover must be killed. And He sent Peter and John, saying, Go and prepare us the Passover that we may eat. And they said unto Him, Where wilt Thou that we prepare? And He said unto them: Behold, when ye are entered into the city, there shall a man meet you bearing a pitcher of water; follow him into the house where he entereth in. And ye shall say unto the goodman of the house, The Master saith unto thee, Where is the guest-chamber where I shall eat the Passover with My disciples? And he shall show you a large upper room, furnished; there make ready. — *Luke 22, 7—12.*

Israel's greatest festival, the week of the Passover, was drawing nigh. Of the three highest feasts of the Old Testament, celebrated by the command of God, the Passover was the most sacred. Each year, at its return, the chosen people of the ancient Church were reminded of the deliverance of their ancestors from the bondage of Egypt, of that remarkable event when the avenging angel of Jehovah passed over the houses (hence its name) and spared the first-born of Israel, but slew the first-born of their Egyptian oppressors. Hurriedly that night the people of Israel received orders to leave their homes. No adequate arrangements could be made. There was not even time to leaven and bake bread; hence, afterwards, in order to recall the privations of the fathers, the Jews were directed to eat the same kind of bread during the festival week, and therefore it came to be called, as in the opening verse of our text, "the Day of Unleavened Bread."

And this Jewish Passover was the type and shadow of another, of a deeper and more glorious significance. The "lamb without blemish and without spot" which had to be slaughtered on that occasion referred to another Lamb. That innocent blood which turned away the angel of death from the dwellings, whose doorposts and lintels were sprinkled therewith, foreshadowed the blood of Him who, as the holy writer says, "through the eternal Spirit offered Himself for the warding off of eternal death." "For," writes St. Paul, "even Christ, our Passover, is sacrificed for us." And while no divine command binds us, the Church, as a spiritual mother, has in her wisdom annually set aside a special period, a number of weeks, in which she directs the minds and hearts of her faithful children to those sacred scenes which connect with our redemption. A few more days and we shall enter upon that season. "Behold," is the touching announcement of to-day's Gospel, "behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are

written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man shall be accomplished. For He shall be delivered unto the Gentiles and shall be mocked and spitefully entreated and spitted on. And they shall scourge Him and put Him to death; and the third day He shall rise again." Or, as He calmly and briefly declares in the text: "The time is at hand," the time for our Passover solemnities.

How, then, in what spirit, with what resolve, shall we keep it? Let that be the theme of devout reflection this morning. How can ours be a profitable and blessed Lent? And may God's Spirit direct our thoughts and impress His Wôrd upon our hearts!

Among the ancient believers the Passover was a time of great commotion and festive preparation. Expectancy and excitement prevailed. Pompous caravans, visitors and travelers from all the provinces of Palestine and from distant realms were continually arriving in the Holy City. Every house was the scene of special activity, and the streets of Jerusalem and the pathways that led up toward the Temple were alive with men, carrying their Passover lambs to the priests; for, as the text states, "on this day the passover must be killed," which act took place in the court of the Temple, in the presence of examining priests. Our Lord, as a devout Israelite, always intent on fulfilling the requirements of the Law and knowing that this particular Passover would be of special importance to Him and for the work He came to accomplish, gives specific directions as to its observance. Selecting two of His disciples, He sends them in advance to provide for accommodations, telling them, according to His omniscience, just exactly how to proceed. They would find a man carrying a pitcher of water. Him, without asking questions and giving explanations, they were to follow and, entering the house, make due request of the "goodman," that is, the owner of the place. And so the Lord still sends forth His messengers. He still uses ambassadors to go before and to present His requests. Such a messenger is addressing you this very moment.

It was no small request that Jesus made. The Holy City was crowded. It is said that the number of visitors on such occasions reached the million mark. Every available space was occupied. In the case of our Savior it meant arrangement for thirteen persons, and our Lord did not wish to be joined with any other company, but desired to be quiet and alone. We read, however, that the request was granted, and not in a hesitating, condescending manner. The goodman gave the matter his personal attention

and supplied the Lord and His disciples with a completely "furnished" and "prepared" guest-chamber, containing all that was necessary for the proper observance of the Passover. We shall not stop to determine who this kind and obliging friend may have been. Probability points to Nicodemus, that wealthy ruler of Israel, who came to Jesus one night and was a secret disciple of the Rabbi of Nazareth. But making spiritual application, what beautiful and suitable sentiment it conveys, now that we are standing on the threshold of another season of Passiontide!

"My time is at hand," says the Master, the time fixed since ancient days for the contemplation of My sufferings and death, the forty days set aside by holy appointment. Where is the guest-chamber, the room for My reception and accommodation? I know that space is crowded, that a hundred and one different topics, attractions, and distractions clamor for occupancy and bid for rental, war, and social upheavals, and daily toil and problems of conservation, and what not. But am I to stand without? I, your Lord and Savior, go searching for entrance; must I be content with a little corner, some paltry, out-of-the-way, dingy accommodation? Not that I am looking for anything elegant and embellished. I am ready to enter the abode of the lowliest and unworthiest, but I desire a cordial welcome; I want a spacious, a large portion in your heart. I do not wish to be annoyed and share space with foreign, irreverent, uncongenial company. Things must be "furnished" and "prepared" for My reception. Let there be spread the tables of Christian thought and pious reflection; let the jars and basins of your ears be ready to receive the holy contents, the lessons and sermons that will be poured out in this gracious season and the lamps of your faith daily trimmed. In a word, may the room of your heart be ready for the residence of so distinguished a Guest, for the contemplation of those things which form the central truth of our holy religion, the foundation and basis on which our faith is built. Is your heart thus ready, my dear fellow-worshiper? To gaze upon Him, the Cross, shall it again be lifted up in prominence in your thoughts and prayers? Thus, and thus only, will yours be a profitable and blessed Passiontide.

And that involves other things. Even with a "furnished" and "prepared" room at their disposal, the two apostles had duties to attend to. The bitter herbs had to be bought, loaves of unleavened bread had to be obtained, the vessels were to be filled with water, and the principal task was to buy, kill, and roast the paschal lamb,

which formed the center of the observance. These several particulars, figuratively, symbolically speaking, enter into a profitable and blessed Lent. What is correspondingly, typically, the eating of the bitter herbs that must attend the Passover? That is repentance, bitterness to the soul. Lenten time is repenting time. Our spiritual welfare requires that there be some special times and seasons, some break in the ordinary course and routine, when our soul is stirred up and shaken, when it should give itself to a deeper concern as to its standing with God and its relation to His holy Law. It is well that we should now and then halt a bit in the onward rush and whirl of daily wear and tear to think seriously what sort of record is ours in regard to Christian character and life, and what would likely be our fate if we were suddenly called to stand before Him in the Judgment, when we have to give account how we have profited by our opportunities.

Let there be prayerful, even though it be painful, self-examination; let us ask ourselves what sort of response we have been giving to the calls and requests of God. Has any one been living apart from God? Has any one been neglecting His daily devotion, His house of worship, or his Sacrament, the known duties of a child of God and follower of Jesus? Has any one been doing a dishonest business; lying, deceiving, cheating, using profanity, or treading in crooked paths, contrary to conscience and the laws of God and better knowledge? Whatever delinquencies and wickedness, backslidings, let there be no hiding, covering up, excusing, but, though it be as distasteful as the bitter herbs, a frank and searching self-examination and sincere renunciation.

It is that accursed thing, sin, that caused the Son of God to go up to Jerusalem and submit to that bitter suffering, shame, and death, and unless you candidly admit that you have this accursed thing within you, and that you are guilty of having transgressed against the holy Law of God, what part and interest have you in His Passion and death? There must be the eating of the bitter herbs.

Lenten time, as stated, is repenting time, heart-searching time. And with the bitter herbs, we heard, went the partaking of the unleavened bread. We are not left in doubt as to its interpretation. The apostle speaks of the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. Our religious life, indeed, at all times should be one of sincerity and truth. Insincerity, hypocrisy, is an abomination in God's sight. We must be honest in sacred things and not deal deceitfully

with others and with ourselves. If there is anything to be abhorred, it is the person who seeks to promote his or her own selfish ends by pretending to be devout and good. And such sincerity and truth must necessarily manifest itself. A question that frequently enters into the spirit of this holy season is that of worldly amusements and social festivities. In the early Church, during the season of Lent, not only the attendance of her members on all public games and shows was forbidden, but the prohibition was extended even to the celebration of birthdays and marriages, because these took place with feasting and tokens of joy, inappropriate, it was thought, during a season which should be devoted to deep humiliation and mourning. The Church Fathers styled Lent a *tempus clausum, i. e.,* a closed time, a time of abstaining from everything that might disturb the heart in its meditation. However, since God's Word lays down no specific rules in such matters, neither must we. It becomes a personal one, which each individual must determine for him- and herself. You know best what effect it has upon your heart, and what influence your example exerts upon those around you, and you must seek to act accordingly. To his own Master each must stand or fall. Howbeit, the Lenten days should be especially marked by a degree of restraint upon our earthliness and self-pleasing, a suspension of gayety, idle pleasure, and loose hilarity, a subduing of engrossment with worldly things, for this will prove a valuable aid in coming to a right sincerity and devotion. It would seem that something of this kind naturally goes along with genuine repentance and the setting of ourselves to a sincere Godwardness, and hence is not only in place, but of great importance. Without such a check upon the attractions and distractions of gayeties and frivolities there is reason to fear that we are not partaking of the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. If our religious seriousness is not strong enough to make some impression upon the outward manner of handling and indulging ourselves, the chances are that it is equally unavailing for the soul. I leave this particular to your further individual reflection and action and proceed to the last.

The main preparation for the Passover was the paschal lamb. In that the celebration centered. A Jew who did not partake of the Passover-meal virtually shut himself out from the Old Testament Church. It is none other with observances of the Lenten season. The center of Christianity is Christ, and the center of Christ's history is His Passion or suffering for the sins of the

world. It is Christ, as the true paschal lamb, whom all those ancient sacrifices foreshadowed, that is being placed before you in this season, in order that you might partake of it in solemn and devout contemplation. To that end the Church arranges for a special mid-week service, the intention of which is to bring before your mind's eye the various scenes of His humiliation and death, and with it goes the invitation: "Behold, we go up to Jerusalem." Are you ready to go along, to accompany the Lord in His path of suffering; to the Mount of Olives, at whose foot is the Garden of Agony; to the high priest's palace, and the Roman judgment-hall; on to the place of a skull with its uplifted cross; along that dismal path of sorrows? Is it asking too much if, during the brief period of six weeks, we are invited to assemble once in extra worship, letting go our ordinary enjoyments, for our souls' and for our Savior's sake?

There is nothing to impress, soften, and bless our soul like an understanding and believing view of what the Son of God has done and suffered for man's redemption. This is to partake of the Passover, spiritually to eat it.

Thus, then, my dear hearers, are we to direct ourselves for a profitable Lent. May we so attend to it.

"My time is come. Where is the guest-chamber where I shall eat the Passover?" Answer: —

> Within my heart; come, let that be
> A furnished place, Lord, kept for Thee.

Amen.

First Sunday in Lent.

And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof and did eat, and gave also unto her husband, and he did eat. — *Gen. 3, 6.*

Without question and without exception the worst thing in this world is sin. And what is sin? Whence came sin? And why did an all-wise and all-merciful God permit the introduction of sin? What reflecting mind has not at some time sought information regarding these questions! That man is a sinner is manifest. It is impressed upon him by experience, by conscience, as well as by the Bible. We are beset by it on every side, as densely

as trees stand in the forest; it hovers like a dark shadow over our pathway. The very air seems to waft it into our dwellings. And that accuser within us, whose voice none ever succeeds in utterly drugging or bribing into silence, called conscience, rises up in testimony and points forward to a time of Judgment, of a final account, so that to deny the existence of sin is equal to denying one's existence. Sin is a fact, however mysterious it may be and is. It is there, and yet, no reverent or even rational mind is satisfied to believe that God put it there. Reason as well as reverence says: "In the beginning it was not so." Reads the sacred Record: "God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good." Then the question meets us again, How did we get into the condition in which we find ourselves? How did man become what he is, a sinner, by inclination and propensity, in disposition and in act? And there is only one source that gives us any information, not of the origin, yet at least of the human beginning of sin, and that is the third chapter of the first book of the Bible. It is a familiar account, yet one which we never tire of rehearsing. Let us, then, consider for our instruction this morning: —

1. The history and the consequence of the first sin.

2. The promise of redemption from sin.

The Lord grant becoming attention!

1.

Read as a history, the third chapter of Genesis informs us that the man whom God made in His image, out of the dust of the ground, not evolved out of some protoplasm or cell, but in full size and perfect form, and whom He had appointed lord of all created things, was lacking in nothing requisite for the development of his God-given nature and the fulfilling of his destiny. The fruit of the trees of the garden furnished him food for the sustenance of his bodily life; in the care of the garden itself he had a field of labor for the exercise of physical strength. Ample opportunity was also given him for the expansion of his intellect. In the woman associated with him he had a sensible companion and helpmeet, and he was in constant and happy fellowship with his God. Under such circumstances nothing was lacking to develop his moral and physical nature according to the will of God.

Presently there appears upon the scene a tempter, an evil spirit, embodied in the form of a serpent. The fact that the serpent had the faculty of speech, reasoned, gave counsel and ad-

vice is sufficient to prove that it was not a mere serpent and should have put man on his guard.

And where was the accessible and vulnerable point of attack? With us in our present condition there are a thousand avenues open to the Tempter, — whenever he wishes to set us at variance with the holy will of God. It was not so then; there was only one point which offered the malignant Enemy some slight hope of success, and that was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Connected with that tree there was a restriction wisely imposed. Its purpose was to remind Adam and Eve that they were dependent creatures and not the sovereigns of the earth; stewards, in obedience to God. Of that, let us mark, yon tree was the constant, necessary reminder. Now, if he could succeed in persuading our first parents that the restriction was an act of arbitrary and tyrannical power, an act, evidencing not love and good will, but rather a jealous desire on God's part of withholding some particular gratification or blessing, in a word, if he could succeed in insinuating doubt and distrust towards God in the hearts of these sinless and inexperienced human creatures, his object would be gained. Choosing, in his subtlety, the weaker and more dependent of the two human beings, the Tempter approaches the woman with the first suggestion of evil. In the form of inquiry, a question, harmless enough, as far as the language is concerned, yet asked, no doubt, in a tone and manner which conveyed distrust as to the justice and benevolence of that regulation, he accosts her: "Yea, hath God said?" Is it possible that God made such a restriction? Have you given it any thought why such a regulation has been laid upon you? I know that you are accustomed to look upon God as a Being who entertains nothing but feelings of good will and kindness towards you, and these feelings are very creditable indeed; but if this were really the case, do you think that He would have shut you out from the fairest and most blessed portion of His whole domain? I ask only for information. Here was the bait. What Eve should have done was this: she should have said: Get thee behind me! Thou art no holy being to cast such a slur upon the goodness of the God we love. Instead, she parleys with the Tempter, lets the new and unexpected light that had broken in upon her do its insidious work. She answers: "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die."

We are glad to hear these words from her lips. It puts it beyond doubt that Eve had the clearest knowledge of her duty. She knew by whom the command had been given; she knew the tree to which it referred; she knew the awful penalty affixed. Otherwise expressed, all is specified in Eve's reply. She was not entrapped into disobedience, in a matter of which she had been left in ignorance. And yet, though she repeats God's command fully, the hellish adversary perceived that it breathed a spirit less resolute than he expected, that the question he had proposed had set her to wavering, and, seeing his advantage, he follows it up with a bold stroke and makes an open denial of the truthfulness of God. His next utterance was: "Ye shall not surely die." In other words: That threat of God is an idle and empty sound. The real truth of the matter is, and God knows it, that your eyes shall be opened, mysteries, as yet concealed, shall be revealed unto you. Your position, being mere subjects of His, will be instantly raised into independence, and you yourselves will be as gods, lords, masters, equal to Him, knowing good and evil. Eve's curiosity thus aroused, her pride irritated, and her lust awakened, what should follow but the act of rebellion! Having once listened to the Tempter, as he arrayed before her the advantage of disobedience, she began to view everything with his eyes. The unknown, mysterious good which this prohibited fruit would confer upon her now filled her soul, and, stretching forth her hand, she took of the fruit and did eat. Adam approaches, and without explaining the details of the temptation, in his case, the Record adds: "She gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat." The deed was done, easily done, soon done; which teaches us that a moment may accomplish the ruin of a soul or of a world. And what matters it whether it be an empire or the product of a fruit-tree, the principle, the essence, is the same when it comes to the trial of obedience.

And now the consequences. They are five in number. The pleasure expected, the dignity predicted, the wisdom promised, where were these? True, their eyes were opened, as the Tempter had said, indeed, but to what? To a sense of shame. "The eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked." To a consciousness of their nakedness their eyes were opened. They realized that their purity was gone, their righteousness forfeited, that they had lost control over the flesh and had become servants of sin, of uncleanness, of sensuality, and so there followed the first

consequence of sin, *i. e.,* shame, which they seek to cover by sewing fig-leaves together and making themselves aprons. Presently the voice of the Lord God is heard in the delightful hour of evening. It would seem that the Lord God appeared to them in a bodily form, that He spoke with them face to face as a man speaks with his friend, and that they looked forward to these interviews with the highest and happiest feelings. But how does that voice sound now? Adam and Eve are afraid; they recoil from fellowship with Him. They hide themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden. The dread of God has taken possession of the souls which He had formed in His own image and admitted into His own fellowship. The second consequence of sin is fear, dread of God. But though they hide themselves, there is an eye that pierces all darkness, and there is a voice which summons all offenders to the bar of Justice.

"The Lord God called unto Adam and said unto him: Where art thou?" And now a third effect of sin begins to unfold itself. Excuses come in to aggravate the transgression which they seek to palliate. The man hid himself, so he said, because he was naked. And when that excuse condemned him, inasmuch as his knowledge of nakedness could come only through sin, he coweringly and cowardly threw the blame of wrong-doing upon his weaker companion in transgression; yes, he dares to implicate God Himself: "The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree," as if to say: "I am not wholly to blame; why didst Thou provide me with this traitorous companion?" And the woman, in turn, charges the serpent. It, not she, was at fault. The third consequence of sin is self-excusing, fixing the guilt upon some one else, not even barring the Almighty.

Then the fourth result of transgression follows, and that is punishment. Sin always finds out its doer. "Be not deceived, God is not mocked." So with the first sin. Each agent in that transaction was summoned separately and alone before the bar of God. First the Tempter in that animal form which he had chosen. The serpent shall crawl forever upon the ground and eat dust mingled with all its food. There shall be war forever between man and it. And so also with the spiritual foe who lurked within it. The whole history of earth shall be that of an incessant warfare between man and his seducer.

The Lord now addressed Himself to the woman; she shall have a destiny of sorrow. "In sorrow thou shalt bring forth chil-

dren." And the man, what shall be his future? A life of toil, excessive, often fruitless, struggle with a soil stubborn and barren, is implicated in his curse; he is to eat his bread in labor and sorrow, until he returns to the dust of the ground from which he was taken. That single sin was the death-knell of man, and not only as to his body, for also his soul within was darkened and dead in sin, and ultimately that soul would pass into eternal death.

And a fifth consequence is brought into view in the closing verses of this third chapter: exclusion, expulsion from that Paradise into which the Creator had placed Adam and Eve. "So He drove out the man; and He placed at the east of the garden of Eden cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life." A more sad and sorrowful incident cannot be thought of, regarded in itself, but the saddest and most sorrowful feature is that it ends not in itself.

The consequences of this first sin were not confined to the original transgressors, but their entire posterity was involved by it in the same condemnation and punishment. We have here the history of the human race. The curse pronounced upon the first woman is woman's curse still. Her history has ever been, and still is, even in Christian lands, alleviated as is the curse, a sorrowful history. With literal severity has the original sentence fallen upon the man and upon his sons. In the sweat of his brow he eats his bread; thorns and thistles have sprung up in vexatious exuberance. And this is not all. Whence is it that every child of Adam instinctively recoils from God, every intelligent and moral being in every age and land is possessed of all the characteristics of what our first parents became guilty of, a sense of shame, self-excusing, inordinate desires? There is only one answer: Like begets like. We are exposed to the same exclusion from the presence of God. "By one man sin entered into the world and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men for that all have sinned."

Such is the verdict written across a Paradise lost — the law of a righteous God broken, disobedience. Say not that it was a terrible punishment inflicted for so little and trivial a transgression as the taking of a bit of fruit. Such an interpretation rests upon a total misunderstanding of the nature of sin. A little reflection on the circumstances, the moral character of those who sinned, and the warning given them, will make you see that yonder disobedience involved rebellion, ingratitude, defiance. Neither say

nor think that God is in any way to blame for the existence of sin, for you are then stepping on dangerous, blasphemous, atheistical ground. Whatever remains mysterious in the matter of sin, its origin on the one hand, and the manner in which Adam's sin affected his offspring, on the other, two points upon which the wisest of men can tell us nothing, — never permit this thought to cross your minds, that God is the author of sin, that He is in any way to blame for its existence and its melancholy consequences. That is but another insinuation of the wicked spirit, who brought our first parents to fall. Nor indulge such speculation as this: Could God not have prevented man from falling? That is a problem concerning the solution of which we must wait for until we are yonder, where all things shall become plain. Meanwhile we content ourselves with the fact, and are satisfied to know, that God's dealings are those of infinite wisdom, rectitude, and goodness; that is borne out by the provisions which God made to give back to man what he had lost through the Fall. When a man has fallen into a pit and lies helpless and endangered at its bottom, it is practically of little or no consequence for him to speculate how he came to fall into the pit, but a question of utmost importance how to get out. Thus, too, it is with the sinner.

2.

Recorded in the selfsame chapter in which the fall of man is recorded, in the third chapter of Genesis, verse 15, there is a wondrous truth, — a silver lining to the black cloud that came over our first parents. It contains a promise, in language seemingly somewhat vague and general, yet exhibiting a grand and gladsome prediction, a promise which brightened the hearts of those crushed transgressors, a promise which was the inspiration, hope, and comfort of their lives. Speaking of the Tempter, God says: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her Seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise His heel." That is, the woman's Seed shall bruise the devil's head, crush it, though the devil shall bruise the heel of the woman's Seed. Who is the woman's Seed? Not the offspring of man; for He was not conceived by man, but by the Holy Ghost. The expression is applicable only to Him who was the Virgin's Son. And between that Virgin's Son and Satan a conflict shall take place, a collision, a sharp clash and struggle, the outcome of which is described as a bruising of the head of the one and the

heel of the other. What is to be understood by those expressions? The bruising of the head of one under the heel of another denotes that one has been completely subjugated, subdued, overcome by the other. The woman's Seed, the Virgin's Son, and the Tempter met in deadly conflict; it was either or. The Virgin's Son overcame the Tempter. To speak without figure: You have here the first prophecy of the work of our Savior on the cross. Christ has destroyed the works of the devil; He has reversed the destructive mischief done by the hellish Foe in Paradise; He has rendered him powerless; He has humbled him, beaten him so that he will never again be what he was before the conflict. He skulks away from the presence of Him who vanquished him. However, that conflict did not pass without some injury to the Virgin's Son. In crushing the head of the serpent, His heel received a wound from the head it crushed. The bruising of the heel was the agony and suffering Satan caused our Savior when he tempted Him in the wilderness, above all, when He suffered unspeakable agony in the Garden of Gethsemane and on Calvary. Yet it was only a "bruising of the heel"; it did not result in serious harm.

You observe, then, that in this passage of the opening book of the Bible we have set forth the whole plan of God's salvation in Christ Jesus: how man fell into sin, and how God at once provided him with a remedy; how he can be saved from sin; He, as it were, throws out a rope to him, by taking hold of which he may be drawn from the pit into which, by transgression, he has fallen. What an appropriate Lenten meditation! Realizing our sinfulness and the mournful and disastrous consequences it has brought upon us, let us turn in faith to that woman's Seed and thus enter into the Paradise regained. To God at all times and in all things be honor and glory! Amen.

Second Sunday in Lent.

Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world, and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. — *1 John. 5, 4.*

Our text presents to us two great lessons. One is that in some sense the world is an enemy, an obstacle, which the Christian must overcome. And the other is that faith is the way and means by which the Christian can and must overcome the world. And when we look at the first clause of the verse, we find a further truth

suggested, *viz.*, that this overcoming the world is a thing of vital and essential concern, that it is indeed a test of Christian profession, that, if any one has not overcome the world, but is manifestly in subjection and bondage to it, this shows that he is not truly a Christian. For thus reads the clause: "Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world, and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."

We do not live long in this world before we come to understand that it has pleased God so to order things that no worthy end can be attained without effort. The schoolboy soon realizes that it is difficult to be diligent and industrious, to learn one's lessons thoroughly and well, but that it is quite easy to sit idle and do nothing. The farmer realizes that he must work early and late to get his field to produce a good crop, while he has only to neglect his field and do nothing to have it covered with an abundance of weeds. And it is in religious life as it is in everything else. It is difficult to be a true, earnest Christian. It is easy to be a careless, worldly person. "Wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction," while, says our Savior, we must strive, yes, His word means more than that, we must make a strong and agonizing effort, to "enter in at the strait gate."

The path of duty, the path to heaven, is an up-hill path. "Work out your salvation," says the apostle, "with fear and trembling." And the text points out one great obstacle in the Christian's heavenward way; not the only one. Last Sunday we spoke of the great adversary and enemy of all good, and the world is his powerful ally and agent through which he carries on his ruinous work. And blind indeed must that person be who does not recognize that worldliness is one of the great besetting sins which most of us have to resist, one of our most perilous maladies. Let us, therefore, praying for divine direction, look at some of the ways in which the world is an enemy, an obstacle, a hindrance, in our Christian course, and see how faith is needful to overcome it.

In Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress,* a book which has been more extensively read in the English language than any other book, with the sole exception of the Bible, there is a scene where Christian is led into a room to behold a man who could look only downward, and who had a rake in his hand. Over the man's head hovered an angel, offering him a heavenly crown in exchange for the rake. But all the poor miserable man did, never as much as even looking up, was to go on raking together the straws and sticks and the

dust of the floor, heedless of the crown. That, indeed, is not a picture of the Christian, but it is a picture of what a Christian is exposed to, and what he must overcome by faith.

How many estimable housewives, busy from morning till night with their domestic affairs, their children, and numberless household matters, tell us that they scarce find a minute to read the Bible or to stop and think where they are going, that in the morning they are so very anxious to begin with the duties of the day and at evening so completely wearied and worn out that they have neither time nor heart for any sort of devotion. How many an anxious man, working and scheming to make ends meet, goes forth in the early hour, too hurried to offer devotion, and comes back to his home at evening exhausted and spent, his mind full of the day's manifold vexations and business cares, and even when, to satisfy his conscience, some form of devotion is regularly performed, it may be with the world uppermost in his heart. When the Bible is read, his eye may scan the words, but his thoughts may be upon some plan for the day. He may pray, but as he prays there seems to be one at his side calling him away to something he loves better. He may go to the house of God and seem attentive and devout, while none but God sees how other matters are flitting through his mind. Or he may toil so hard through the week as to lose all relish for Sunday's worship and make the Lord's Day chiefly a day for his run-down powers to recruit, in order that he may start fresh again when the field of labor is open. Is this not the experience of alas, so many? And what would you call this? The Bible calls it "worldliness."

According to the Bible the main concern for this life is the salvation of the soul. "For what," our blessed Lord asked time and again, "is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" It is the most wretched exchange, the most miserable bargain, he could ever make, worse than when Esau sold his birthright for a mess of pottage, worse than when Judas bartered away his Lord for thirty pieces of silver. According to the Bible the one thing needful, more needful than the necessaries of life, than the daily bread and nightly shelter, is the pardon of sin, peace with God, a saving faith in Christ's great atonement. This is more essential than food and raiment, even as the life to come is more essential than this life, and eternity than time. Nothing, therefore, should ever be permitted to conflict with the one thing needful. God never meant that the support of the body should be

gained at the expense of the soul. He never says that property and earthly possessions are essential to our happiness. The most unhappy people are largely those who have them. Happy, blessed, is the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Yes, God plainly says that these ever-gnawing perplexities, this being unduly concerned and troubled with many cares, is sin, and He warns us against it as choking the good seed and killing the fruits of the Spirit. Nor is it superfluous to add that we in our larger cities are perhaps especially subject to this danger, where we see the multitudes around us engaged heart and soul in the one great pursuit of wealth, where you hear nothing all day but the language of trade and live, as it were, on the very edge of the whirlpool of worldliness, so that it is almost impossible to avoid being carried round in its rushing currents; and, coming under its all-pervading influence, there is greater need of watchfulness. And how, my dear fellow-Christians, can we keep these worldly cares from making our souls utterly worldly? How can it be brought to this, that the man in occupation and business may give to his business just thought enough and no more, that the housewife may not let her household duties come between her and her salvation, that care and anxiety do not nip all holy affections and aspirations and make us worn, miserable creatures, wretched in time, and yet not able to spare a thought for eternity? How can it be brought to this? The apostle tells us.

Our text says: "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." What faith? The distinct Christian faith, that faith which is wrought in the believing heart by the Holy Spirit; that faith which realizes how short this life is when compared with the great eternity. How little and how fleeting are all worldly interests, all earthly gains and losses, when compared with the pearl of great price, an assured part in Christ and His kingdom; the faith that tells us that man's life consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses, that true value lies not in broad acres or hoarded wealth, from which a week's illness or a moment's shock may part us forever, but in that nobler estate which has been purchased by our Savior's blood, and that faith which, trusting with childlike confidence in that Savior's love, wisdom, and power, casts all care upon Him and His strong arm and so feels the crushing burden lifted from his own weak heart.

Have that faith, my dear hearer, exercise it, and you have overcome the world; it lies at your feet, you are its slave no more.

Nor only for these few isolated moments of devotion in God's house; let it be the daily mood and temper of your hearts; let that conviction grow into you: "Yonder is my home and portion fair; my treasure and my heart are there," and you will engage without fear in the business of this world and not be unduly affected by its gains or losses; you will rest content that He who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, will arrange and dispose for your good all the events of your earthly lot. It is the soul accustomed to gaze on spiritual and eternal things that sees the objects of this earth in their real significance; and to see this world as it truly is, is to overcome it. That faith, too, will regulate our prayers, our time, the sincerity of our devotion and attention to the things of God, so that we shall seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, knowing that all else shall be added unto us.

Nor is this the only sense in which the world is an obstacle to our Christian life, needing to be overcome by faith. To refer to a scene from the book mentioned before. Christian, on his pilgrimage to the Celestial City, came to a place called Vanity Fair; but his reception there was anything but cordial. How could it be? He found himself in complete variance with its thinking and acting, and so they spitefully entreated him, with mockery and ridicule, jest, and even violence. It is not different to-day. The world is still a Vanity Fair, whose spirit, principles, and hopes are absolutely at variance with the spirit, the doctrines, and the hopes of the Church. Our Lord has said: "Ye are not of the world"; in it, but not of it; and His apostle directs us: "Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind." A Christian is not a worldling; there is a sharp line of separation between them. He is a witness against its unbelief, its corruptions, its deceitful ways, however gilded by specious names. Let a man be a Christian in deed as well as in name; let any faithful appear in the streets of Vanity Fair, and see whether he does not meet with its disapproving mockery, sneers, and malignity.

Of course, the world will have no objection to a person's being a member of the Church if he still continues open to all its solicitations, if he cooperates with it on its own level and for its own ends. What need the devil concern himself to harass and persecute people who are as much at ease in the playhouse and beerhouse as in the place of devotion, to whom worldly pastimes are as interesting as the Gospel, worldly people as dear as the children of God, who, indeed, are their closest friends and asso-

ciates? To such the world does not object; it loves them and defends and upholds them. But let a Christian voice his convictions, seek to win them over to what ought to be his heart's deepest concern, prick their easy-going conscience, and as surely as God's grace and the Spirit of Christ are in him, he will be put down as a fanatic and a fool, and every inventive power will be used to put him out of the way. Try it, my beloved, and yours will be the laugh or the stare of contempt. It is not easy to say practically everywhere and at all times: "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ." And how can this obstacle of the world be overcome? "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." A Christian knows and feels that, though he be looked down upon and meet the sneer and ridicule of the worldling, he has the approval of his Master, who fared likewise. He has the sunshine of God's favor in his soul. There is a silent Eye that watches him in all his acts, watching that, though he be shut out of the society of some, his name is on the roll-books of eternity, that he belongs to the glorious company of the apostles, to the goodly fellowship of the prophets, to the noble army of the martyrs, to the royal family in heaven; that he is a child and heir of God and joint heir with Jesus Christ. And such assurance he would not forfeit for all this world or anything or anybody in it. Realize that, my dear hearer, by earnest faith, and the criticism and derision of this world will be to you no more than the cords which Delilah put around Samson's powerful arms.

And the same is true also with regard to the pleasures of this world, which form another obstacle to the Christian, especially the young Christian. Man is a social being, and so there will be sociability, recreations, and amusements; and these things may be innocent and legitimate. But, alas! too often, under the direction of the Enemy of our souls, they degenerate into the opposite, into wild and unreasonable excesses, levity and impurity. But here again, "this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." A Christian who has consecrated himself to the Lord will not lend himself to indulge in any form of diversion which one who is a consistent disciple of Jesus dare not attend. His faith, noted in such passages as these: "Ye are bought with a price," even the precious price of Christ's blood; "therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's"; "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" "How, then, can I do this great wickedness and sin

against God?" — such faith, I say, will be to him a check-rein, a means of overcoming the world. He would not do anything to wound his Savior, or anything that would bring reproach upon his Master's cause.

We have regarded the various dangers that threaten us on the part of the world, as well as the means of conquest. May that faith be rooted down deeply in your hearts! May this be your sincere confession: —

My faith looks up to Thee,
Thou Lamb of Calvary,
Savior divine!
Now hear me while I pray,
Take all my guilt away;
O let me from this day
Be wholly Thine!

Amen.

Third Sunday in Lent.

And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said unto David, The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die. Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die. — *2 Sam. 12, 13. 14.*

The story of David's great transgression, of God's forgiveness of it, and the punishment which followed it, is an account which fits in most admirably with the Scripture-lessons appointed for this Sunday. May the God of purity and pardon guide our words and impress our souls!

Our text conducts us in spirit to the city of Jerusalem, into the residence and palace of Israel's far-famed king. But how changed does everything appear! Otherwise so rejoicing and cheerful, he is downcast, dejected, gloomy in countenance and soul. Accustomed to commune with his God as a friend with a friend, his lips are now sealed in silence. The time was when the halls of the regal mansion would resound with the psalms and spiritual hymns of the sweet singer of Israel. Those notes are hushed; the harp stands neglected and unstrung. Happiness and peace have flown from his heart, slumber from his eyelids. Why this change? Our tongue falters to speak it.

An atrocious wrong-doing, a twofold grievous guilt, is the cause. Israel's king and saint has fallen. To lift the veil of history: Whilst the army of Israel was engaged in laying siege to

Rabbah, the capital of the Ammonites, its leader, the king, preferred to tarry behind in Jerusalem, and since idleness and indolence are the devil's workshop, he fell a prey to a grievous temptation of Satan. While walking on the housetop, he had contracted an illicit attachment for the wife of his brave captain and faithful friend, Uriah the Hittite. A cunningly devised scheme to cover up his lewd advances had miscarried, as recorded in this chapter, and, in consequence, he framed up one still more ungodly, which, if successfuly carried out, would leave Bathsheba a widow and permit him, with a show of legality and right, to espouse her as wife. He sent Uriah, the husband and victim, with a carefully sealed letter to the commander-in-chief of the forces, Joab. The contents of the letter read as follows: "Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle and retire ye from him that he may be smitten and die." Unscrupulous Joab readily did the bidding of his royal master. Uriah fell, valiantly fighting the enemy of his treacherous king. Nor was this all. Once sin has twisted its slimy coils around one and fastened its venomous fangs into the soul, it continues its disastrous work. To adultery had been added murder, to murder was added hypocrisy, lies, and deceit. As our text reports: "And when the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah, her husband, was dead, she mourned for her husband." What mockery that mourning was! And David, no doubt issued a proclamation of sympathy and condolence over his fallen hero. But no sooner was the customary time of mourning past than "David sent and fetched Bathsheba to his house, and she became his wife."

And it need not be told with what fiendish glee, with what gloating joy and blaspheming, as our text says, the scoffers and enemies of the Lord, in and outside of Jerusalem, must have handled the matter; for unfaithful Joab saw to it that it leaked out. Such was the offense. We are surprised, perplexed.

What concerns us most immediately is, How can we account for such enormous iniquity in such a man? A number of reasons may be given as explanation, not as an excuse. In the first place, let it be observed that this sad episode occurred during a period of idleness. David had left off working for God; he had settled down into a state of inaction; he was taking life easy. That was the beginning of his backsliding. It always is. When people begin to tarry at home instead of going to the house of God, when they gradually lessen their attendance at public worship, when they relax their fervor and fail to partake of the Holy Supper of the

Lord and shirk their Christian duties, they have taken the first step toward the backslider's doom, perhaps without being fully aware of it, and you may at any time hear of a complete severance of their connection with the church and of a grievous fall. My beloved Christians, let this lesson teach you "never to lay your armor by," never to cease to live and work for God and His Church as long as a spark of life remains in your heart and a throb of intelligence and vitality in your frame. The people of God went out to battle, David tarried at Jerusalem, and — he fell.

A second reason for David's backsliding is that he did not shut his eyes, did not turn away from what was improper. Walking on the flat roof of his house, he witnessed a sight against which he ought to have fortified the inlet of his senses. It is so with us. We are living in the midst of a perverse, a corrupt, and adulterous world; scenes of unchastity, sensuality, and sexual debauchery surround us on the right hand and on the left, in street and shop, in picture and print, to say nothing of those places where the world holds carnival and which no Christian will voluntarily attend, but rather sedulously avoid. Over against these, lest he be carried away, pertains the command: "Let thine eyes look right on and thine eyelids straight before thee." Guard your senses, particularly your eyes. David failed to do that, and he fell.

However, the third and chief cause of David's fall was that he failed to keep diligent and careful watch over a treacherous rebel, a traitor within the camp, his sinful heart. David was a true saint and servant of God, but when a man becomes a Christian, he is not yet rid of the roots and shoots of evil. The old Adam, the carnal nature, the body of sin, is something that clings to him to the grave. And that sinful heart of his, that old Adam with his sinful passions and lusts, must be carefully guarded and kept under, lest he fall into temptation. That, it is evident, is the practical purpose which this and other records of the sins of good men in the Bible are designed to serve, *viz.*, to be continually on our guard; for if even a David fell so fearfully, who among us can be secure? Here was a man of preeminent ability, of great piety, and of extensive usefulness, and yet he became guilty of the most revolting sin. Surely the practical inference is: "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

No station in society, no eminence in the Church, no excellence in character, no, not even the gift of divine inspiration can keep a man from sin. Nothing can do that but the grace of God work-

ing in him through prayer and persevering watchfulness. I say persevering watchfulness, for our vigilance must be continued as long as life lasts.

We often speak of the days of youth as the most dangerous time of life; and indeed, when one regards the warmth of feeling in the opening years of manhood and womanhood, the inexperience found with those who are at that stage of existence, the self-sufficiency which, for the most part, characterizes them, it would be difficult to exaggerate the dangers which, especially in our large cities, beset the years of youth. But that is not the only dangerous time. If we consult the Word of God and take it for our guide, it would almost appear as if those in middle age and those who are verging toward the period of old age are in a stage of existence as trying and dangerous as that of youth. Noah and Lot were far from youth when they fell before the influence of strong drink; Demas was not by any means a "novice" when he forsook Paul because he "loved this present world." David, too, was past the mid-time of his days when he committed those great transgressions. All of which impresses us with the importance of our Savior's exhortation to watch all through life. The world is full of defilement, and, in passing through it, we must gather our garments tightly around us if we would keep ourselves unspotted from it. Nor only watch, but, adds the Savior, we must also "pray"; not watch and then pray, not pray and then watch, but watch and pray at once. While the eye is eagerly searching out the danger, let the heart at the same time be sending up the earnest supplication: "Hold up my goings in Thy paths that my footsteps slip not."

Thus shall we be kept in safety, until at length we enter into that land where our purity and reward shall be alike indestructible. So much as to the question, How can we account for David's great transgression?

Continuing the narrative. It must have been about the space of a year when the Lord sent a fearless and faithful prophet by the name of Nathan to the king. After the customary courtesy the prophet asks permission to present a certain case for the king's decision. Two men, he reports, lived together as neighbors, the one rich in flocks and herds, the other poor. One day a visitor came to the rich man's home and, wishing to entertain his guest liberally and to set an appropriate table, went over to the poor man and stole his only and pet lamb. And then, pausing, he inquired of the king his verdict.

The story is so finished in its beauty, so admirable in its construction, and so perfectly adapted to its end that it is without doubt the finest thing of its kind in the Old Testament.

Having listened to the parable, the king's eye flashes with honest indignation at such a low and covetous unrighteousness, and in the impatience of his anger he exclaims: "The man that hath done this thing shall surely die." "Well," says Nathan, as he points at the royal sinner, "thou," David, "thou art the man." In a moment David sees all that he had done. Conviction, like a piercing arrow, goes to his heart. He bows his head. Tears of penitence trickle down his cheeks, and sinking down before his God in contrition, he confesses: "I have sinned against the Lord." For seven days he retires, broken-hearted over his fall, and if ever words breathed grief and humiliation, it is the 32d and the 51st Psalm, which he wrote after his restoration to God's favor and the assurance of forgiveness.

There is nothing more impressive than to read, when that arrow from Nathan's quiver pierced the royal sinner's conscience, what promptly followed — not palliation, not excuse, not blaming others or circumstances, but unreserved, frank, and open confession, striking in its simplicity. "I have sinned against the Lord." From an inexpressibly deeply moved heart comes the acknowledgment, the penitential prayer: "Cast me not away from Thy presence. Hide thy face from my sins and blot out all mine iniquities. Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation."

As long as a man puts himself on the defensive with God, as long as he seeks to justify himself in whole or in part, hesitating to make a full, free, unreserved confession of his sin, there is no real token of true repentance. Go through all Scripture, and you will everywhere find that, where repentance is sincere, confession is simple. So David here: "I have sinned against the Lord." So the publican in the Temple: "God be merciful to me, a sinner!" And so with us when we appear before God. Away with all self-sufficiency, hypocrisy, hiding, and justifying, and a plain: "I, a poor miserable sinner, come to Thee and acknowledge my transgressions." And where there is sincere repentance, there follows what is the most comforting and refreshing part of this account, the unconditional, full, and free forgiveness of a gracious God. Instead of loathing and abhorring, of rejecting and thrusting from him, the man whom he had so highly favored, and who had so disgracefully forfeited it, He restores him after he has made his

confession, receives him into grace, blots out his transgression, and casts it behind his back, into the depths of the sea, so that it shall not appear any more forever. David was again God's child and walked in the light of His countenance. And that is the chief reason why this record appears on the inspired page, to encourage those who have been overtaken in a fault not to despair, but to seek forgiveness. Knowing that, if forgiveness was not withheld from so vile an offender as David, neither will the same gracious God in heaven withhold it from them.

I know that some doubt has been expressed as to the genuineness of David's repentance, as to its having been very deep and thorough. I know no better answer than this: Let such read the 51st Psalm. Voltaire, the spiteful and ignominious infidel, once attempted to burlesque this psalm, and what was the result? While carefully perusing it that he might familiarize himself with the train of sentiment which he designed to caricature, he became so oppressed and overawed by its solemn devotional tone that he threw down his pen and fell back on his couch in an agony of remorse. It is hollow, shallow philosophy that sneers at such a history as this of David; nay, it is even worse than that, it is the very spirit of Satan, rejoicing, as it does, in the iniquity of others. And here is one of the distinctions between the people of God and the wicked in the earth. It is not that the one class commits no sins while the other falls into iniquity. No, the godly man still sins. The difference lies not there. It lies here — that, when the child of God falls into sin, he cries to God for pardon, purity, and for grace to leave it and strive against it. When the ungodly man, however, falls into sin, he continues in it and delights in it and does not repent of it and fight against it.

However, to teach us "what an evil thing and a bitter it is to forsake the Lord," as concerns this present life, the holy writer adds, though David received forgiveness, a sad "howbeit": "Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die. Now, therefore, the sword shall never depart from thine house, because thou hast despised Me and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife."

Do you ask how this agrees with the free and full forgiveness which he had received? In this way. God had taken from him the penalty and punishment of his sin, but He did not say, Thy sin shall not be bitter to thee. Nay, rather, it *shall* be bitter, so

that thou and all who know of it, all who will ever hear of it from these holy pages, shall see what sad consequences it leads to.

Once the evil has been sown, it brings its fruits. Let us trace the series of tragedies comprised in David's history from this point on until his death. First there is the death of Bathsheba's child; then he sees his guilt repeated in the sin of Amnon, who was slain by the sword of Absalom; then there is the rebellion of Absalom, largely due to the adherence of Ahithophel, who was the grandfather of Bathsheba; then there was the death of Absalom, inflicted by Joab, who from this point on became more arrogant and overbearing than ever, because he knew that, being in the possession of the secret of the manner of Uriah's death, he had his sovereign thoroughly in his power. Then, last of all, there came another revolt to disturb the peacefulness of David's death-bed. But sadder than these is the change which from this point we observe in David himself. He is no longer the man he was. The spring of his life seems to be gone. The noble features of his character seem to have become eclipsed.

It is not saying too much that David's after-story, to the end of his life, is a scroll, written within and without with lamentation and mourning and woe.

Beloved, if we would lead happy Christian lives; if we would not thus sow to ourselves harvests of a future sorrow; if we would not hush the voices of joy in our homes; if we would spare ourselves many a stroke, many a wound that will else come upon us, let us seek to lead holy lives, lives of purity, fleeing from sin as from the face of a serpent. There are those who have said that the sins of God's saints and servants embolden us to sin. What ignorance! For we see how they were plagued for their offenses. Rather let those sins be motives to us for watchfulness, for close and careful walking with God. If David, after all his acquaintance with the things of God, was betrayed by a corrupt and treacherous heart, what may not we fear from the same source! If he, a standard-bearer, fell, how shall we hope to stand unless we lean on some higher and better strength than our own! Let us be watchful, and if we have fallen or fall, — which God may prevent! — then let us turn to Him in honest, upright repentance; it is the only thing that can save us from the depths of utter despair, from everlasting destruction. May God bless the solemn lessons of this hour, the mournful story of David's transgression! Then has it not been written in vain. Amen.

Fourth Sunday in Lent.

And the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, Arise, go down to meet Ahab, king of Israel. And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the Lord, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine. And, The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel. — *1 Kings 21, 17. 19. 23.*

If there is one account of Holy Scripture that brings before us in a most striking, yes, even most startling manner an example of what is called the law of retribution, *i. e.,* that wickedness never goes unpunished, it is the history of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. It is well for us to be reminded of this, as there is no little danger of either forgetting or practically denying it. The pious psalmist says: "I myself have seen the ungodly in great power and flourishing like a green bay-tree," and he confesses that his feet were almost gone, that his steps had well nigh slipped, and that he had been ready to think religion altogether vain when he saw the prosperity of the wicked; how those who think not of God, but dishonor him in word and in deed, often seem — to use human language — the very favorites of fortune, increase in riches, and do not share the common troubles of mankind. And many a one besides Asaph has been tempted to think likewise, to his great perplexity and some to the loss of their faith in the justice of God. When, however, the inspired singer betook himself to the Sanctuary, when he considered the end of those men, if not always in this world, yet in that which is to come, he writes: "Fret not thyself because of evil-doers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity; for they shall soon be cut down like the grass and wither as the green herb."

This, then, is the question before us: Does God always punish wickedness? or, to express it theologically, Is there an unfailing law of retribution? This we shall for once set forth by doctrine and by example, and draw from it a few lessons and duties. May God the Holy Ghost grant His blessing!

That sin never goes unpunished, that it always meets with its reward, sometimes in this world and always in the world to come, is a truth which we may learn from the nature of God. God is not merely the Creator, but He is the sovereign Ruler of the universe. God is holy; He hates sin. And God is just; He punishes sin, our own and that of others. What would we say of an earthly ruler or a government which issues laws to be broken with impunity? We would say that it was either too weak to be able to

enforce them or too corrupt to care to do so. But God is neither. He is omnipotent, of infinite power, and He is just. Retribution, therefore, is as certain as God's own being. He must, according to His nature, punish sin to the uttermost. Moreover, He has declared this time and again in His Word, by the mouth of His holy prophets. He has said: "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that *will by no means clear the guilty.*" "I, the Lord, thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me." And His holy apostle has said: "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." "Indignation and wrath," says the apostle, "tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil." His holy Word is full of such declarations.

Nor is it only a doctrine of God's truthful Word; it is one of the innate beliefs of human nature, found wherever treads the foot of man. There are certain notions, practically universal, which have their basis in this law of retribution. Take, for instance, the sense of responsibility. Ask any one, "Are you a responsible being?" He would reply: "Certainly. All men, in proportion to their sound and sane reason, are responsible beings." But if responsible, then we must be responsible to some one. Though many, from a feeling of dread, may challenge the statement, yet, as has often been shown, deep down in human consciousness is the belief in a Day of Judgment; that there must be a time and a place where our responsibility will be discharged, where our accounts will be rendered to Him to whom ultimately, as our Creator and sovereign Lord, we are responsible. Those feelings of remorse, those scruples and accusations of conscience, that haunt, like glaring specters, the souls of the guilty, are the beginnings of a retribution here. But the final retribution will be on that day when God shall bring every work into Judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or evil. This, then, is fully discerned from God's nature, from the declarations of His Word, and from the actual appointment of a day, the Day of Judgment, for retribution, punishment.

Now, a common error on the part of many is to demand that retribution shall always take place in this life. A distinction must here be made between believers and unbelievers. The sorry con-

sequences of sin are inflicted upon both; but as the Lord will admit the righteous to unmixed happiness in the next life, where no punishment is meted out to them for their wrongs upon earth, He visits *them* in this world. As to the unbelievers, unrighteous, and ungodly, He sometimes signally interferes, even now, and shows that He is by no means an unconcerned spectator of what takes place here below. Yet for the most part God reserves His punishment of the wicked until they enter the eternal world. To point, then, as many do, to this and that notorious case of the ungodly, to contend that their prosperity lasted throughout life, that they did not suffer the penalty of their evil deeds, proves nothing against God and retribution, for in such a case of ungodliness, punishment has merely been delayed, suspended; the sinner will not ultimately escape it, for no one escapes the sad consequences of his sins. As to the righteous in this world, God indeed, as we shall hear later on, forgives their sins when they repent, but, as the Bible expresses it: "Thine own weakness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee." Take, for instance, Lot. Lot, by a too worldly and covetous choice, settled down in the fertile valley of Sodom and Gomorrah, and this worldliness and covetousness of his God made the instrument of his punishment; for he lost all his possessions in the destruction of these cities and most probably spent the rest of his days in deepest poverty and bitterest spiritual sorrow. And so with David, who was punished for his adultery, and with Eli, whom the Lord punished for failing to rebuke and punish his sons; with Moses, for giving way to anger and speaking unadvisedly with his lips; with Jonah, for fleeing from the presence of God; with Peter, for his fall. The same thing is true with regard to us. The dark days, the sorry experiences that we must go through, judge and see, my dear fellow-Christians, whether they are not often the visitations of the Almighty, whose name is Jealous, and who does not want His children to go astray, but visits their transgressions with the rod and their iniquities with stripes. From that there is no exception, no escape. They are a salutary discipline for our spiritual benefit.

And yet there is a most important distinction, *viz.*, that the visitations of the Lord upon His children are paternal, not penal; not intended for punishment, but for correction. To him who is not a Christian the divine afflictions are a punishment; to him who is a Christian they are only a correction, a discipline. Why? Because Christ has borne all our punishments. "There is now no

condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." Christ has atoned for all our sins, for their guilt and the punishment we had deserved on account of them; and so God does not punish those who believe in Him; He has punished His Son instead. But He uses the sorry consequences of their sins to correct them, discipline them, and chasten them. Our afflictions, then, are paternal, fatherly. Let us once and for all grasp that vital truth. It is the tree cast into the bitter stream of life's affliction that will make that stream sweet and beneficial to our souls. Wonderful provision, revealing to us the mediatorial power of the Cross of Jesus Christ.

As to the ungodly, we stated that their sins are always punished in the world to come, oftentimes, however, already in this world. An instance out of many that might be quoted we have in the text, in the death of King Ahab and his infamous Queen Jezebel. Ahab, together with Queen Jezebel, had filled all the land of Israel with idolatry, the worship of Baal and Ashtoreth, and had committed many acts of direst sin, among them the murder of Naboth, for refusing to sell his vineyard to the royal house. It was a cruel, cold-blooded deed, and the word of the Lord came to Elijah, the prophet, saying: "Arise, go down to meet Ahab. . . . And thou shalt speak to him, saying, Thus saith the Lord, . . . In the place where the dogs licked the blood of Naboth, shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine. . . . The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel. . . . I will make thine house like the house of Jeroboam." Every detail of the retribution was complete; for at the very spot where Naboth's blood had been licked by the dogs, Ahab was slain and his blood licked by the dogs; and Queen Jezebel fared in a most shocking manner, exactly according to the words of the prophecy. Jehu commanded that she be thrown out of the window of her palace, and when they went to bury her, they found no more of her than her skull, her feet, and the palms of her hands.

What renders the account of the death of Ahab and of Jezebel especially striking is the fact that it is one of those instances where the punishment exactly fits the offense. As they did, so they were done unto. There are many others in history. Thus Henry III of France was stabbed in the same chamber where he had helped to contrive the bloody massacre of the French Protestants. Alexander VI was poisoned by wine he had prepared for another; Marie Antoinette, riding to Notre Dame Church for her bridal,

bade the soldiers command all crippled and ragged people to leave the line of procession, saying she could not endure the sight of these miserable ones. Soon after, bound in the executioner's cart, she was riding toward the guillotine amidst crowds of poverty-stricken people, who gazed on the haughty queen with hearts as cold as ice and as hard as granite. When Fouleon, her contemporary, was asked how the starving people were to live, he said, "Let them eat grass." Not long afterwards, his head was stuck upon a pike and his mouth filled in the manner suggested by himself. The law of retribution never fails. Sin, my beloved hearers, is not like a footstep upon the desert sand that may be made to-day and effaced to-morrow. It is like a crack in a rock or like a diamond mark upon the transparent glass. When once committed, it is indelibly engraved upon the mind of the Almighty and, unless repented of and canceled by the divine remedy, carries with it its own condemnation.

And what are the lessons which this solemn subject suggests to us? In the first place, it teaches us rightly to regard sin; secondly, to betake ourselves to the only remedy. There are many who have a low estimate of sin; they speak of "little sins"; they distinguish between venial, pardonable sins; and they speak of them as youthful follies, as a sowing of wild oats. God's Word knows of no such distinction. The Bible says the slightest breach of the divine Law is sin, and the smallest deviation, even in thought, is sufficient to take a man's soul to eternal perdition. One little hole will sink the largest ship to the bottom of the sea. The stab of a penknife in the heart will kill the strongest man as readily as a ball from the largest cannon. One drop of some poison into the system will bring instant death to the most robust body. So one single sin shut Adam out of Paradise. One sin shut Moses out of Canaan, and one sin, dear fellow-sinner, if not forgiven, will shut you out of heaven. How foolish, then, for any one to think and speak lightly of sin!

Some even go so far as to say that God is too good and gracious to punish sin. Have they ever gazed upon that scene yonder in Gethsemane and seen the Son of God writhing in agony, sweating great drops of blood, overwhelmed with the crushing weight of our iniquities? Have they ever, in thought, been on Calvary's mount and heard that piercing cry: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Behold, then, the most overwhelming testimony of God's abhorrence of sin, of His unfaltering

determination to punish it to the utmost. Truly, therefore, they are fools who make little of that which is the greatest evil in the world, the cause of all misery, here and hereafter, who flatter themselves that God will overlook sin. No, let us watch against the smallest, the slightest approach of sin as against the poison of asps and the bitterness of gall. With the godly fear of a Joseph let us exclaim: "How, then, can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?"

And lastly, — and this is most important, — let us betake ourselves to the remedy. That only remedy for a world of sinners is to be found in the death and merits of Christ Jesus, our Redeemer. Here are the words of Scripture: "He has borne our sins in His own body on the tree." "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed." "The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin." That Son of God became incarnate; in human form He walked this earth. He became sin for us. He stood in the sinner's place, as his Surety, his Substitute. He became a curse for us. His blood, shed on Calvary's cross, if we believe in Him, frees us from all condemnation, so that God no longer imputes our sins to us. The sad consequences may still go on, as we heard, — God in His wise counsel may use them for salutary purposes, — but the condemnation, the guilt, is no more; our sins can do us no harm, they shall not be charged against us. The drunkard may still have to suffer in his body the consequence of his excess; the thief may still be haunted by the recollection of his wrong-doings, and our conscience will rise up against us all; but there is One who is mightier than conscience, even the great Lord God, who says: "I have blotted, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions." They shall be canceled through a Savior's all-sufficient blood from the register of Heaven. "God hath made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." For that reason the Gospel is proclaimed to us and the holy Sacraments have been instituted.

To repeat an illustration: It is related of the great Reformer that he had a dream in which he saw Satan entering his room one night and with an air of insolent triumph displaying a huge roll of parchment from which he began reading the catalog of Luther's sins from his youth up: sins of omission and commission; sins in thought, word, and deed. Luther's heart sank within him; but,

master in God's Word that he was, he quietly permitted his accuser to finish and then, asking for the roll, wrote across it in bold, decisive letters these words: "The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin," whereupon he awoke to find both the devil and the roll gone. There is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.

This is the blessed truth; this is the comforting declaration of the Gospel; this is the precious boon conferred upon us in the holy Sacrament. Let us, then, my dear hearers, in this season, set apart for humiliation and penitential prayer on account of sin, seek to obtain a lively sense of the evil of sin, cultivate a holy disposition to guard against it in thought, word, and deed, and, above all, seek the divine remedy against it, namely, let us take refuge through faith under the Savior's Cross. There alone is forgiveness, security, salvation.

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee;
Let the water and the blood,
From Thy riven side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure,
Cleanse me from its guilt and power.

Amen.

Fifth Sunday in Lent.

And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt.

Ex. 12, 13.

In order to humble the pride of its powerful and insolent monarch, King Pharaoh, the Lord had sent plague after plague upon the land of Egypt. There had been fire and hail and darkness; successive swarms of loathsome and offensive insects had subjected the people to the most dreadful annoyances; the Nile's delicious waters had been turned into blood; the locusts had blighted the harvests; murrain had destroyed the cattle; and sore and grievous sickness had wasted the strength of the inhabitants. But the monarch's stubbornness stood against all these miraculous calamities. It required some severer visitation of vengeance to break that defiant obstinacy. That vengeance came. Let us convey ourselves in thought to that Oriental land. It is the spring of the year and the fourteenth day of the month Nisan. Shadows of night are fallen, and the Egyptians have returned to their homes

from the busy market-places and fields. For a short season they had ceased, alarmed by those wonderful happenings, to oppress the children of God, and knowing that on the morrow the people were going to offer a solemn sacrifice unto the Lord, their God, they had given them, on their demand, every man his neighbor and every woman her neighbor, jewels of silver and jewels of gold. The busy world lies hushed in the arms of slumber. Not a footfall sounds in the empty thoroughfares. Silence reigns throughout the land, — when, hark! the stillness is broken by a dread and mysterious sound. It is the rushing of the destroying angel's wings as he unsparingly proceeds on his fearful errand, sweeping through the length and breadth of the country, carrying death and desolation in his path. For we read: "There was not a house where there was not one dead." Mothers see the infants at their breasts stricken, fathers behold the joy and pride of their lives turned into dull and senseless clay. An exceedingly bitter cry rises from every house. In the royal palace, in the lowly cottage, that gruesome messenger of death is doing his avenging work, smiting the first-born of every family. Every family has to mourn its dead, and the wail of the bereaved thrills wildly along the air.

And from this scene of desolation and sorrow we look at another. We step into the home of one of those downtrodden Hebrew slaves. Though it is night, "when deep sleep falleth upon man," yet all the household is awake. What meaneth this eager excitement and stir? Why have they their loins girt about, their sandals on their feet, their staves in their hands, as those prepared for a long journey? Four days previously they had gathered the bleating flocks from their different pastures and sought until "a lamb without blemish" had been found, "a male of the first year," perfect and mature. For four days this lamb was set apart by itself. And on that evening the father of every Hebrew home brings forth the lamb and puts it to death; and as the blood flows forth, he catches it in a basin and with a sprig of hyssop sprinkles it upon the lintel and the two side-posts of the door of his house. Then amid solemn silence, he directs that the animal be roasted with fire. "Not a bone of the lamb is to be broken" nor a part of the flesh to be carried out of the house; the whole is to be eaten at the family board. And when thus prepared, he hands it to the inmates, who in haste begin to eat the lamb, taking with it unleavened bread and bitter herbs. As they are thus engaged, there is a deep stillness in the chamber; a reverential awe

settles upon all hearts. And this feeling of dread increases as midnight approaches; over their house is heard the rushing of the angel's wings, passing over their door to smite every first-born Egyptian. And how is it that their own house is spared? How is it that he does not fold his wings at the doors of the Israelites; that he enters not to fulfil his mission of death? Because he sees the blood of the paschal lamb upon the lintel and upon the two side-posts. It is that mark which preserves the Hebrew household from sharing in the destruction of the Egyptians on this night of disaster, "that night of the Lord to be observed of all the children of Israel in their generations."

Such is the historical setting of the text. Let us now turn our thoughts to the typical significance of that feast, the most sacred of the Jewish festivities, called the Passover, and which was annually observed with great solemnity among the Jews. The Lord Himself, as it were, invites us so to do on this Sunday, when in the Gospel-lesson He utters those soul-stirring words: "Behold, we go up to Jerusalem." The purpose of His going there was the observance of the Passover. Whenever that solemn proclamation is heard, one's mind goes out towards that season which has ever been a period of spiritual refreshing to all devout Christians. The center of Christianity is Christ, and the center of Christ's life and mission is the Cross, His suffering and death, even as the understanding and appreciation of these is the one essential condition of salvation. And most instructively is it typified by the Old Testament ordinance that is placed before our present consideration. The Paschal, or Passover, feast pointed to the future. The redemption of God's ancient people from the land of bondage contained the germ and promise of the redemption of God's people from a still greater bondage. The lamb then offered to commemorate the past pointed the expectant eye of faith to the Lamb of God to be slain in the fulness of time. When "Christ, our Passover," as St. Paul designates Him, was sacrificed for us, then the purpose of God, which lay enclosed as an embryo in the paschal institution, became fully developed, met its fulfilment. To trace the details and make further application shall be the subject of our further meditation.

The animal to be sacrificed at the Passover was to be a lamb "without blemish and without spot." The very purest, cleanest, and best of creatures, nothing else would answer; and even this had to be the finest and most desirable specimen; no imperfection

dare attach to it. Now, this finds its antitype in Jesus, who, although "made of a woman," was miraculously free from all the stains of our corrupt and fallen humanity; who was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners"; who, though He took upon Himself our sins, was absolutely without sin, the incarnation of all that is great and good and pure and sublime. And as the lamb was to be "a male of the first year," so did Jesus in the prime of His manhood, when His human powers and faculties attained their full maturity, offer up His life, becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

Again, it was commanded concerning the paschal lamb that they were "not to break a bone thereof." Now, turning to our Savior's history, this type was remarkably fulfilled at the crucifixion. Crucifixion was a lingering death. The person nailed to the cross was many hours in dying. However, we read that the Jews, since the day on which our Lord was crucified was the day of preparation of the Passover, sent to Pilate, beseeching him to break the limbs of those who had been crucified, so that they might remove the bodies. This breaking of bones was usually done with clubs, after which a stroke on the breast terminated the life of the unhappy criminal. When Pilate, in response to the Jews' request, sent the soldiers to perform this duty, they broke the legs of the first and of the second; but "when they came to Jesus and saw that He was dead already, they brake not His legs." And the evangelist adds this comment: "These things were done that the Scriptures should be fulfilled, A bone of Him shall not be broken."

Again, the lamb was to be "roast with fire." What was this but a type of the sufferings which Jesus endured when, marred and mangled on Calvary, He was given to the burning flames of God's wrath and justice. That is what the fire is an image of, God's wrath and condemnation upon man's sin. And when bound hand and foot to the stake with rugged nails, the clammy sweat gathered on His brow, the exclamations of an unmeasured inward anguish quivered on His parched and sorrowful lips, a convulsive struggle thrilled through His mangled frame, and the Lamb of God hung dead in the face of the heavens, which grew dark at the awful spectacle. Add to this that the lamb was suspended on a stick run through lengthwise and one fastened crosswise, descriptive of the figure of the very instrument of torture on which the Savior was suspended when He yielded up His life as an all-atoning sacrifice,

and the illustration is completed. After the lamb was duly roasted according to the divine command, it was to be eaten with many significant observances, each of which is worthy of remark.

The lamb was to be eaten "with bitter herbs." These bitter herbs typified repentance. There can be no genuine reception of Christ without sincere acknowledgment of our sinfulness. "Grant that I Thy Passion view with repentant grieving." And, oh! when we remember our manifold transgressions, the sins against better light and love, the numberless times that we have grieved the Holy Spirit of God, the many unworthy returns we have made for all the goodness of the Lord, we surely have much cause to abhor ourselves and to repent in dust and ashes. Lenten time particularly is repenting time. True faith and godly sorrow for sin go hand in hand.

Again, the paschal lamb was to be eaten "with unleavened bread." The meaning of this command is fully explained by St. Paul in his First Epistle to the Corinthians, where he says: "For even Christ, our Passover, is sacrificed for us; therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." "Leaven" is used in Scripture as an emblem of deceit and guile; thus, for instance, our Lord bids us beware of the "leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy." So our reception of Christ as a Savior must be a *heart* reception; the form of godliness must be accompanied by the power thereof. We must be real, earnest, sincere. Religion must have a place below the surface. "The kingdom of God is within you." "A name to live" is not sufficient; we must be in very truth alive; our whole mind and soul and strength must be fastened on the things of Christ.

Lastly, the paschal lamb was to be eaten by the Israelites with their loins girded, their shoes on their feet, and their staves in their hands, and they were to eat it "in haste," as men prepared for a journey. Egypt was to be left at once; there was to be no delay, no tarrying. The flesh-pots, the leeks, the onions, the garlic, were all to be abandoned; the Israelites were thenceforward to set their faces like flint and follow whithersoever the Lord would lead them.

Now, as we review all this, of what is it a type but of our redemption? That redemption was threefold. The children of Israel were delivered from the galling yoke of oppression. Their slavery in the land of bondage was now at an end. The lash of

the taskmaster was over them no more. So we through Christ are free from spiritual slavery, from the bondage of sin, that cruel oppressor into whose hands mankind had fallen. Then, Israel in Egypt was under the iron hand of an awful tyrant. Pharaoh had a heart of stone. He took no account of the sighs and groans of his downtrodden subjects; indeed, he answered their complaints by imposing heavier and harder tasks. But what was the tyranny of a merciless Pharaoh compared with the rule of him whose type he was, Satan? But it was from him, that hellish enemy and tyrant over men's souls, that Christ delivered us. Once again, on that awful night when the avenging angel went about, death held its rampage. So, ne'er a family, age, condition has escaped the ravages of this grim king of terrors. But there is One who has robbed him of his sting, as the apostle exults: "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be unto God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." These, then, are the threefold elements of Christ's redemption as we confess in the Catechism: "Who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil."

The Passover, however, is a type not only of the manner of our redemption, but also of the enjoyment of it. In order to be benefited by the slaying of the paschal lamb, the Jews were commanded to mark the side-posts and the upper door-post of their houses with the blood of this lamb. Not the threshold, you will note. Woe unto the man who treads under foot the blood which was shed for sin! Only such houses were spared where the mark of blood was found. That was the token. The lamb slain would be of no benefit to those who neglected to apply its blood. And so the death of the Savior will be of no avail to us unless we by faith appropriate its blessed results. Is the blood upon your door-posts? Has the lintel of your hearts been sprinkled with the precious blood of Christ? There is nothing besides this blood that can purge away sin; and we all need its cleansing power. All are sinners, miserable sinners. Truly, we ought to eat, with the bitter herbs of repentance and contrition, that Paschal Lamb whose "flesh is meat indeed" and whose "blood is drink indeed." Can we think of any Israelite refusing to eat the paschal lamb on the night of the people's deliverance? And ever afterwards, would not such refusal have been an act of rejection of redemption, an act cutting oneself off from the people of the covenant? And, to mention this

particular, how can any Christian live in continued disobedience and neglect of the divine command concerning that holy ordinance appointed by Christ on the night when He went forth to our deliverance by refusing to eat of that meal, that Sacrament, of which the paschal supper was a type? Think what that involves, as Luther in the Preface to the Catechism says: "It is to be feared that such a one is not a Christian." God in His mercy keep us from such guilt and rejection of Christ and His salvation!

Significant was the provision that the lamb was to be eaten by families and groups. It was not to be the service of an individual, but the individual was to join with others in the celebration. So no Christian can be satisfied with personally enjoying the blessed results of Christ's redemption. He must be anxious to have others share in the blessing. Especially those of his own household must be a matter of concern to him.

Such, then, is the instruction to which the incoming season of the church-year invites us. Our Church makes no special demands upon her members with reference to it. She does not command them to abstain from meats, as though that could help to atone for sin; she prescribes no special diet for the body. She provides for a special service each week, observed for the consideration of our Lord's sufferings, that we may enter into a deeper appreciation of them. And where there is that realization of what these sufferings, as intimated in this evening's discourse, mean and what they do, there this solemn season should bring us the blessedness that connects with the great atoning sacrifice by which alone any mortal can be saved, live peaceably, and die happily. May we enter upon the approaching holy time with an honest and earnest desire to be partakers of salvation in Christ Jesus, the true Paschal Lamb! Amen.

Palm Sunday.

(Confirmation.)

And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then shall the Lord be my God, and this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house; and of all that Thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto Thee. — *Gen. 28, 20—22.*

We have in these words the first vow mentioned in the Bible. Jacob, fleeing from the wrath of his brother Esau, is on his way

from Beersheba to his uncle Laban in Mesopotamia. Tired from his day's journey, night coming on, he lies down upon the naked ground, selecting for his pillow a stone of that place. He dreams a dream. A ladder appears in his vision, angels ascend and descend upon it, while at the top, manifested in some outward token of His majesty, was God Himself. He also hears a voice: "Behold, I am with thee and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land." Overcome with emotion, he awakens from his slumbers and exclaims: "This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven," whereupon he vowed a vow, saying: "If God will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then shall the Lord be my God, and this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house; and of all that Thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto Thee."

I know no words more suitable for the present occasion, the character of which you well understand, and the solemnity of which may well fill us with the deepest emotion. Let us see, then, how far Jacob's resolutions pertain to you and what they lead to.

First of all, we may remark that it was a wise and a good thing that Jacob formed a resolution. There is nothing more transitory and fading than men's sentiment, and that pertains to religious sentiment also: "As a morning cloud and as the early dew it goeth away." How impressed people sometimes are! How frequently have I seen them at sick-beds and at caskets! Tears trickled down their cheeks, and their frames shook with agitated tremor. Or, seated in the house of God under the sway of an eloquent address and witnessing a scene like this present one, they have been immensely moved. Yet how little does this amount to if it does not produce religious decision.

If Jacob had allowed the religious impressions received here at Bethel to remain religious impressions only, I very much doubt whether they would have continued with him in any force for many hours. As he left the associations of the spot behind him, his reverence for that place would have become less and less, his sense of God's presence would have become feebler and feebler, and his desire for God's service fainter and fainter. But when he reduced these impressions and emotions to a resolution, he fixed them. Just like metal; if you would give it form, you must first of all reduce it to a liquid state (fusion); but liquid or molten

iron would never serve the purposes of ordinary life. Neither will melting emotions serve the purposes of spiritual life; they must be cast into the mold of resolution, and that is the purpose of your gathering here this morning.

It is sometimes said: "How young are our catechumens! Do they realize the step they are taking, the vow they are making?" My beloved, who is to determine the age of religious decision? What do they lack? Knowledge? Would to God that some here present were grounded as firmly in the faith as they are. Or sincerity? Then you do not know them. With whom is God more pleased than with the first-fruits of love and devotion laid upon His altar? What period of life is there more appropriate before facing the temptations of the devil and this world, yes, and the perplexing problems of life? None but the careless and the enemies of religion can find fault with their presence in God's house and their resolutions. And which are these?

When we come to look at Jacob's vow, we find that it contains, most beautifully and fully expressed, three elements. "Then," says he, "shall the Lord be my God." What does that mean when we, too, make this vow? Two things. First, that He alone be our God. Well, is there any other? No, but people make themselves other gods, else why should the First Commandment read: "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me"? The world is full of such other gods, beings and things that usurp His place and authority, control their hearts and wills and ways, drawing them away from Him who is their rightful Lord and Master. For what is God? God, as the very word tells, is man's highest good; yet thousands are there who seek their highest good — in what, in whom? In pleasure, in money-making, and in things worse than that. Does not the apostle say of some that their belly is their god, and does not the psalmist remark: "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God"? Now, to make the Lord your God means to regard Him as your highest good, the object of your supreme reverence and regard, to consult His Word and His will in whatsoever you do. I have taught you, my dear catechumens, that there are two ways in which everything may be done, the one with God, the other without God. People may do their daily work with God and without God. They may get married in two ways, with God and without God. And this is what makes one of the fundamental differences between God's people and those who are not. They begin, continue, and end everything with Him. Where He is not,

they will not be; where His name is not revered, His honor not upheld, His holy Book not respected, that is no place for them. They form no connections, they hold no fellowship, of which He is not partner. Like in the vision of Jacob, the Lord God stands at the summit of the ladder; He stands at the summit of their lives, above all, in all, with all.

Let this be the first resolution as you set out upon your Christian responsibilities. Say it now, at this very moment, and in this very place: "O God, Thou art my God; my Alpha and Omega, my First and my All."

Secondly: "And this stone which I have set for a pillar shall be God's house." It is believed that upon the very spot on which Jacob raised this pillar afterwards stood the Jewish Tabernacle. Be that as it may, it is evident that he intended the place to be kept forever sacred to the worship of Jehovah. Not as if God were confined to any locality; He is everywhere to be found; and yet He has established for Himself a habitation upon earth, a place where His honor dwelleth, and that is His Church. And no wiser and more blessed thing can any one do than what Jacob here did, fix upon some Bethel; such did he call the place, which means house of God. In their ignorance and perverseness people often say: "We can be saved without the Church; one can be just as good a Christian outside of it as in it." This is a lie of the devil, by which he seeks to deceive and destroy souls. Why, if such were the case, did our Lord ever establish the Church, and that at such tremendous cost? And why, on Mount Sinai, did He give commandment concerning it? No, let nothing prevent you from remaining faithful members of the Church; attach yourselves to it in holy purpose and resolve and resort to it diligently, regularly. Let it not be merely a matter of taste and fancy, but, like Jacob's, of resolution (resolution is always stronger than fancy), till it grows to be with you a fixed, unalterable habit of life; and ever cherish, I beseech you, a fond recollection for this very place in which you sit these moments. Association is most helpful to refresh the memory of God's goodness and to recall the vows we rendered to Him. If there is one spot that has grown most endeared to me, — and I never fail to visit it in my native city, — it is the old church at whose altar I laid down my heart in life-long consecration. Oh, for the thoughts that crowd upon me, the scenes it revives, and the renewed impulse and inspiration it gives! Come back at times, wherever life's current may carry you, to this

your Bethel; go not with the multitudes, ever increasing, who, wiser than God Himself, who has so graciously provided for them, despise the preaching of His Word, His worship, His sanctuary, His Sacraments, whose names are not found enrolled among the lists of God's people on earth, though they wish to be among them on high. "This stone shall be God's house."

"And of all that Thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto Thee." God had promised to prosper Jacob in his earthly career, and Jacob responds to that promise by vowing to the Lord a tenth of all the possessions He would give him. In what way that one-tenth was to be expended we are not told, neither shall we at the present dwell upon the idea of proportion that it was one-tenth. What we would note is that he gave a representative part of his income; and if you would have God's blessing in life, you must adopt a like resolve. Here is one place where people make their greatest miscalculation. They withhold from the Lord, thinking to benefit thereby. They never do, they never can. Why? Because everything rests on God's blessing, and you cannot have God's blessing without performing your obligations toward Him, neither financially nor any other way. Ingratitude, niggardliness, toward God has never succeeded and never will; those things stand in the relation of cause and effect. Never fail to support your church; and do not let it be dollars for luxuries and pennies for Christ. Nor should you support your Church only financially; there are many other ways. The Lord needs workers, men and women who are willing to give up their time, talent, and influence. Where should they come from if not from your ranks? And shall there not be found among you one or two whom God needs, who are willing to give themselves to that noblest calling which He has entrusted to the hands of men?

How otherwise can the work of God's kingdom go on? Thank God, we have such willing workers, ranging from confirmation age to eldership. As this appeal comes to you in these moments, will you not resolve to be among them, so that it may be said of you what you have seen chiseled upon the marble slabs at the exit of this aisle: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." Would this not be a proper and grateful return for all God has done for you? Place that vow also upon the Lord's altar; dedicate yourself to the service, the support, and the work of the Lord.

And what does it all lead to and involve? You are acquainted with the features of the story. Jacob came to his uncle Laban

in Mesopotamia and remained there for twenty years. Nor was it one unbroken series of sunshine and flowers. To quote his own language: "In the day the drought consumed me and the frost by night, and my sleep departed from mine eyes." We also know what deception was practised upon him by Laban; yet he could exclaim: "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which Thou hast showed unto Thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands." And afterwards, when his sons deprived him of his beloved Joseph and he was compelled in his old age to go to the land of Egypt, he experienced just what God had promised him at Bethel. Through it all God was with him, kept him in all places whither he went. The same divine promise pertains to you. Wherever your lot in life may be cast, whatever its adversities or its prosperities, He will be with you, help you, and cause you to stand, upheld by His righteous, omnipotent hand; yea, though your pathway should lie through trials, His grace, all-sufficient, should be your supply. Do but place your hand in the hand of that great Jehovah and Savior.

And what does it finally lead to? Picture to yourself the inspiring scene from Jacob's life — the last. He was now one hundred and forty-seven years of age. Gathered in his chamber is a little group. He leans upon his staff, the selfsame staff with which he had reared a Bethel, and, clinging in faith to the promised Redeemer and Lord, he blesses his household. There you have a picture of how religion ends. It ends well. Would you, my dear catechumens, have it end thus?

In contrast picture another scene. It was in our large City Hospital. The man was a familiar figure on these streets; cancer was eating up his throat and tongue. Time was when he, too, had knelt in confirmation and had been singled out by his family for the ministry. There he lay now, a dying man, with a wrecked body, a wrecked home, the dreadful Judgment and eternity before him. Recollections of the day, when as a pious, God-fearing, cheerful lad he, too, made his vow, came back to him, and he sighed in sorrow and repentance. Having confirmed five of his children, I asked him to gather them, as Jacob of old, around his bedside and to commend to them, before his tongue would be hushed in silence, Christ and His saving Gospel. "Oh!" he said, and tears filled his eyes, "how can I? I have so shamefully denied Him myself."

My dear catechumens, when the earthly house of your tabernacle shall fall, when, bidding farewell to the scenes of this world, your immortal soul will be summoned hence, what shall be the manner of your life's close, Jacob's or that man's? What does it depend upon? Upon how you keep your vow. Be true to your God and Savior. Be true to your Church. Be true in your Christian service.

May you till your latest breath
Christ confess with constant meekness;
May you faithful be till death,
Strong in Him 'mid all your weakness;
May you live in Him and die
Heirs of mansions in the sky!

By the grace of God be true, and on the Last Day you will receive the crown of glory from your Savior's hands. Amen.

Easter Sunday.

I will sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously. . . . Thy right hand, O Lord, is become glorious in power; Thy right hand, O Lord, hath dashed in pieces the enemy. — *Ex. 15, 1. 6.*

'Tis Easter — Easter, the festival of resurrection and life, the time when in nature the earth pulsates with the throbs of renewed energy and force, when, to quote the lines of the inspired singer, the winter is past, the flowers appear on the earth; the singing of birds is come; when the fig-tree putteth forth his buds, and the vines with the tender grapes give a good smell. Spring, lovely, rejuvenating spring, nature's season of resurrection and life, has once more dawned upon the land. And it is Easter in the Church of God. We have just passed through a week of sorrow and deepest anguish. We have seen our Lord's crucifixion. We have seen His side pierced by ruthless steel, His head dropping motionless upon His breast, and His body then stored away in Joseph of Arimathea's rocky tomb. To-day we contemplate another scene. As the rising sun tinges with its golden beams the Eastern skies, He that lay in that tomb sits up erect, unbinds the napkin that enveloped His sacred brow, removes the spices and fine linens, and issues forth. The earth shakes at His footsteps, the guards fall in convulsive tremor as dead men, the rocks rend asunder, while white-robed angels, descending, roll away the ponderous stone from the door of the sepulcher and sit in guard upon the vacant tomb

and proclaim its power broken and its one-time Occupant risen. That is the event. And with it has come Christianity's grandest and crowning festival, which finds the house of God filled with ecstasy, the altar arrayed with flowers of immaculate white, its hymns and music pitched in sublimest hallelujahs, and the church-bells ringing out in tones of loudest and most melodious melody. The spirit of gladness, sublimest exultation, hope, and joy, is abroad. And well it might be. For what wondrous treasures are wrapped up in its wondrous fact! What foundations of blessed hope has it laid for our fallen human race! To what heights of glory does it point! A veritable ocean of holy thoughts engulfs us. We wish for an angel's genius and an angel's tongue to give somewhat adequate utterance to the mighty truths that are involved. As it is, our poor stammering lips shall seek to set before you in these holy moments for your instruction, your comfort, and your inspiration —

The Glorious Easter Victory.

Let us note,

1. Wherein it consists;

2. With what sentiments we ought to observe it.

1.

There have, in the course of these well-nigh six thousand years, been scenes of joy in this earth's history that have thrilled men's hearts to the uttermost recesses. Think of Noah when he stepped forth from his ark which had rocked for one hundred and fifty days upon the waves of an ocean world, stepped out upon the soil of a new earth that glistened with the roseate hues of the rainbow. Or in our own days, who can ever forget the moment when, after years of bloody conflict, as millions were massed in bitter warfare by land and air and sea, raging in all its murderous fury, cutting down the flower of humanity and spreading universal ruin and horror, — I repeat, who can ever forget the moment when the message was flashed abroad, and echoed by every whistle and bell in the land, that peace had at last been restored, and that the nations had ceased from gory butchery. What tears of joy, what expressions of unrestrained ecstasy did it not bring forth! Yet can I think of no event in the annals of nations more transcendently joyous than that referred to in the uplifting strains of our text. You are all acquainted with the connecting history. For four hundred and thirty years Israel had dwelt in the land of

Egypt, a downtrodden and persecuted people, slaves and bond servants, mixing mortar and toiling in the brick-kilns under the hot Oriental sun in poverty, obscurity, and bondage. Over them ruled, with iron hand, a cruel and heartless tyrant, Pharaoh, who, among other inhuman measures, had decreed that every male child born to the Hebrews should be cast alive into the waters of the river Nile. Finally the cries of God's chosen people reached His ears. He determined to help them. His two representatives, Moses and Aaron, appear in the presence of Egypt's king with the petition: "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Let my people go." "Who is the Lord?" was Pharaoh's insolent and defiant response, "that I should obey His voice?" Then occurs a series of plagues, blow upon blow is dealt by the offended majesty of Heaven; yet each judgment only serves to harden the heart of the frenzied monarch, till one night the angel of death goes forth. By the side of an open casket, enshrining the corpse of his former son, the heir apparent of Egypt's mighty throne, the tyrant buries his face in his trembling hands and issues the decree: "Get you forth from among my people and go!" However, no sooner are the Israelites on their way than the bugle summons the Egyptian men to arms, chariots are equipped, and with the speed of the whirlwind the soldiery of Egypt are in hot pursuit. It was a critical situation. Mountains hemmed them in on either side, in the front rolled the waters of the Red Sea, in the rear were the mighty warriors of Pharaoh. A fearful cry rises from the ranks of the Israelites, when, behold! Israel's leader stretches out his hand, the waters divide and stand erect like a wall of glass, while all night long could be heard the footsteps of the marching throng as dry-shod they pass through that miraculous channel; and when the sun arose, they stood on the farther shore, a free, delivered, ransomed people. And now comes the climax. With their arrows leveled, their chariots driving furiously, the hosts of Egypt dash into the deep and sandy bed of the separated waters, when, lo! Moses again lifts his wonder-working rod, a fearful roar is heard, and down come the waters like the thunders of May, completing the work of vengeance upon those who dared to fight against God.

Now, what, it may be questioned, has that event, thrilling as it is, to do with our festivity to-day? What has been written aforetime has been written for our learning. This event is a type, a foreshadowing, a feeble representation, of this day's occurrence. Israel was in bondage; but tell me, is there a severer bondage,

a more dreadful slavery, a captivity more degrading, than that of sin, as it shackles not only men's bodies, but their souls, and binds them in the cruel fetters of the things of time and of sense, fleshly appetites and desires, mixing not mortar, but perdition for themselves against the day of wrath? And can any one conceive of a situation where death was more imminent, destruction threatening to overwhelm them, than yonder Israel's fugitives on the banks of the Red Sea? And is it not from these very things that Christ has come to deliver us? There is sin; what desolation has it wrought in the earth, how much suffering and sorrow, defilement and bereavement! Christ has broken its power; He has snapped its yoke asunder; He has loosed its heavy chains. By His victory on Calvary and His glorious resurrection He has freed His people from its bondage, as Scripture says: "He was delivered for our offenses and was raised again for our justification." There is the devil; but "for this purpose the Son of Man was manifest that He might destroy the works of the devil." What meant that conflict on Friday last when in spirit we witnessed how the Seed of the Woman crushed the head of the serpent? We know its significance. And then, on this day, prior to His resurrection, He descended into hell and visited the infernal enemy of God and man in his own realm. What was the meaning of that act but this, that, as our Catechism tells us, Christ thus exhibited Himself to hell as Conqueror. He plainly showed that He had triumphed over all His infernal enemies. And so with death. If ever it seemed that that universal conqueror had conquered, it was when hands of holy men and loving women had wound that sacred body, with the crown of thorns encircling His brow and cruel nails piercing His hands and His feet, in linen clothes and carried it to the new tomb in Joseph of Arimathea's garden. But not so. In spite of watch and stone and imperial seal He issues forth this day; for it was impossible that He should be held by death and molded in its dishonoring dust. Just as we sing: —

> Lord Jesus Christ, strong Hero Thou,
> Grim death Thou hast o'erpowered now;
> Thou dost destroy hell's gate and chain,
> Dost on the third day rise again.

Who can fail to perceive the striking resemblance between that Old Testament event and the glorious occasion of this day's observance?

2.

And so with the sentiments that ought to attend it. We read in our text: "I will sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously." Thus Moses and the people lifted up their voices in strains of rapturous thanksgiving over their deliverance, while Miriam, his sister, responded with a company of virgins on instruments of music. How those notes of exulting melody must have rung amongst the wild hills and mingled with the noise of the mighty waters beneath which Pharaoh and his armies lay entombed! Not a single voice among the one hundred thousand of Israel but added its strain to the anthem peal. And in Christendom? Should there be a single soul that does not join in the triumphant song and the jubilant Easter music?

> Awake, my heart, with gladness,
> See what to-day is done!
>
> Raise your joys and triumphs high;
> Sing, ye heav'ns, and, earth, reply!

Christ is risen! Sin's bondage is broken; there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. We are free. Christ is risen! The hellish tyranny of earth's monarch is prostrate; he is dethroned and disarmed. "He's judged, the deed is done; one little word can fell him." Christ is risen! Nor is there a grave that shall not some day set its tenants free, nor one dead who shall not live again. "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? That is the one sentiment of joy, gratitude, and praise that ought to pervade every heart and open every lip.

And again, reflect for a few moments more upon that glowing event referred to in the text. When the sun went down on that eventful night in the land of Egypt, the Israelites were slaves and strangers, a despised and downtrodden race; when they arose, they were a great and independent people, destined to take their place among the historic nations of the earth. What a change! It was to them Easter, a resurrection, indeed; a new life, new prospects, new hopes, new service, opened up before them. So with us. Easter calls for a resurrection. As the apostle writes: "Like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." That miraculous deliverance meant so much to these Israelites, and Christ's vastly more transcendent victory and deliverance should mean little or nothing to us? To the early Christians it meant everything. The most joyous and principal festival with them was not Christmas,

but Easter. In its commemoration they chose for worship the first day of the week, Sunday, to remind them that each Sunday was a miniature Easter Day. On their emblems and insignia it was the resurrection fact that received the most prominent expression. Not less so in their inner life. When this festival came, they would heed the words of the epistle appointed for the occasion: "Let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." If there was anything amiss in their character as Christians, in their relation one toward another, in their behavior, something which did not accord with the observance of this high and sacred day, it was set aright. Let it be so with us. God grant us that we may rise from sin, a new and holier life to live begin! Conscious of the great Easter fact, its significance and its glorious message to this perishing, dying world of ours, let us grasp the hope, the salvation, the comfort that connects with it, and also the corresponding obedience, consecration, conduct, and service. It is most striking to read how in that sublime chapter of Holy Writ, the fifteenth chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, the apostle, in the 58th verse, concludes: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." And who knows not the simple words of our Catechism: "That I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, even as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity"? That let us resolve, that let us do, till the solemn words shall be pronounced over our lifeless remains: "Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust," and there slumbering until that great and final Easter Day, with body and soul reunited, we shall pass on high to live and reign with Him forever. Amen.

First Sunday after Easter.

And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us by the way, and while He opened to us the Scriptures? — *Luke 24, 32.*

It was the third day after the crucifixion. On the afternoon of that day two men leave Jerusalem and take the path that leads to a small village called Emmaus, a few hours distant from the

Holy City. They are not apostles. One of them is Cleopas; as to the other there has been much speculation, but we know not his name. In all probability it was St. Luke the Evangelist.

It is spring, and they are passing through one of the most enchanting parts of the Holy Land, a most beautiful landscape. Not things of nature, however, but topics of the soul, heavenly themes and considerations, engage their thoughts and tongues. It is plain, too, from their voices, countenances, and gestures that the subject under discussion has cast a gloom over them; they appear greatly dejected. About midway, perhaps, between the city and the village these two disciples are overtaken by another traveler, a stranger, who joins them and asks: "What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another as ye walk, and are sad?" At first they regard his intrusion most unwelcome. Who knows if he is not some spy, seeking to insinuate himself into their confidence in order that he may betray them! But scarcely has this stranger begun to speak when their fear entirely vanishes. There is something in his looks and his voice which fascinates. They hang upon his words with palpitating bosoms. How, probing the source of their grief, he counsels and cheers them! Despondency begins to give place to hope, and so the three, engaged in conversation, walk on together.

The sun had gone down beneath the gray hilltops of the land of Judea, and the shadows of evening had begun to deepen in the narrow valleys, when the two travelers reach their home, and with true Oriental hospitality, reluctant to part from such a companion, they invite their fellow-pilgrim to come in and abide with them for the night. Nor does he refuse. Seating himself with them to partake of the humble evening meal, the stranger stretches forth his hands to bless it, and they are suddenly startled to see in those open palms the signs and scars of the cross, while they recognize in the tone of that blessing the voice of their adorable Master. Overwhelmed with wonder, they are ready to cast themselves at His feet, when He vanishes out of their sight. In a moment they are out again upon the stony path that leads to Jerusalem, making their way with winged steps to that memorable house with its upper chamber where they tell their story of the evening walk to the assembled brethren. It is this account we would reflect upon in holy assembly.

There are two things, we shall find, which rendered the pres-

ence of Christ at that time so very desirable. The one was their ignorance of the Holy Scriptures, together with the attending unbelief. The other was their grief for their crucified Lord.

Let us see how the Risen One corrected both these conditions in them and still does so in us.

1.

It was an abrupt and severe reproach that fell from the lips of this Stranger when He remarked to these men: "O fools and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!" Yet was it a reproach, most just and deserved; for into what palpable and mischievous darkness had their ignorance of Holy Scripture betrayed them! In the first place, how faulty was their conception of the Messiah! "We trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel." Like the rest of the Jews they expected the Messiah to be a temporal sovereign, an earthly ruler, though every promise and prophecy predicted a spiritual deliverer. Nor only this. "The chief priests and rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death and have crucified Him!" How could these things be reconciled? The hope and joy of Israel, the promised Messiah, the magnificent Savior, in whom converged all the light vouchsafed to patriarch and prophet, and all the sacred promises to bless the earth, expiring on a cross, that most shameful, execrable instrument of death — impossible! No wonder that ominous doubt and perplexity, like a funeral pall, was cast over their spirits! Why? Because the only basis of faith, the testimony of God, the Scriptures, was ignored. Had they examined and comprehended the writings of Moses and the prophets, they would have seen that Jesus had fulfilled exactly "the things in all the Scriptures concerning Himself," that His suffering and death, at which their faith staggered, were indispensable to His mission, "behooved Him." Had not the psalmist declared that the kings of the earth would set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against His Anointed? Had not Zecharias foretold that the enemies of the Messiah would weigh the pieces of silver for which He would be betrayed? Had not this prophet predicted that the Shepherd would be smitten and the sheep be scattered? Had not the same prophet and David in the 22d Psalm described His death, saying that they would pierce His hands and His feet and look on Him whom they had pierced? On the pages of the Book of Isaiah had not all His sufferings been foretold with minutest accuracy? Had this prophet not said of Him that He

would be "despised and rejected of men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," that He was to be bruised and wounded, oppressed and afflicted? And had not Jesus Himself often informed them that He had come into the world to die upon the cross? Could they have mistaken His meaning when He stated that He must go up to Jerusalem and suffer many things and be killed and be raised again?

In view of all this the rebuke of the Savior was therefore well merited on account of their folly and unbelief in turning from such clear testimony and preferring their own vain reasonings: "If He had been the Messiah, He would not have submitted to such ignominy." Is it any different to-day? Are not the evidences constantly around us how a neglected or perverted Bible brings darkness, unbelief, and sorrow into the soul?" The Revelation that is from God, to "make us wise unto salvation," with what absorbing desire men ought to hasten to know its contents and obey its communications! But what is the treatment God's Word generally finds, even on the part of His professed people? It is a melancholy record. No wonder that the world is full of the Cleopases and Lukes, agitated and perplexed souls. That pertains to matters of doctrine, Christian teaching, and to matters of personal experiences.

To matters of doctrine. How often are people in doubt as to this teaching of the Church and that: the doctrine of the Trinity, the doctrine of the atonement, the virgin birth of Christ, Christ's descent into hell, and the doctrine of the Lord's Supper. Difficulties environ them, and doubts make them hesitant and sad. How shall these be met and removed? Precisely as those of the men of Emmaus.

Take the Scriptures and, beginning at Moses and the prophets and continuing to the evangelists and apostles, listen to the voice that speaks through them, study the passages that bear on these points, search with an earnest and open mind, and just as that orb that God has placed yonder in the sky dispenses brightness and light, will this God-given Book dispense enlightenment, satisfaction, admiration, and adoration, and in the place of perplexity will come conviction.

Of those two disciples who went to Emmaus on that Easter Day we read that they exclaimed in ecstatic emotion: "Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us by the way, and while He opened to us the Scripture?" And while we may wish that this divine commentary had been preserved to us, what a model

exposition it must have been. And yet, Jesus still walks with us and talks to us in this inspired Volume and by His Spirit opens to us the Scriptures. It is a wonderful Book. One hour alert with a sincere and prayerful mind in its perusal is better than years of human teachers. When we have its interpretation and explanation, we need no other instructor. There you have the key that will unlock all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. And oh! for the throbbing life, the exulting hope, the inspiration, the warmth of heart it imparts to love and to live for God and His Church, when once you have grasped its high and glorious teaching concerning a gracious, benevolent Father, a divine Redeemer, and a sanctifying Holy Spirit. Verily, there is none like it. Clasp it to your bosoms, till they are aglow with this heavenly fire it imparts! For "they are they which testify of Me," says your Savior.

And so with respect to the experiences of life.

2.

The darkest period through which the Church in its infancy passed was Good Friday and Holy Saturday. A cloud of despondency akin to despair was spread over its followers. All that made life to them worth living had sunk into the grave with their Master. His lifeless body rested upon yon rocky couch in the garden of Joseph of Arimathea. Their faith was eclipsed; their hopes had received what seemed a death-blow. Cleopas and his companion were leaving a scene every step of which suggested memories the most distressing and tragic. But "when need is greatest, God is nearest." "Man's extremity is God's opportunity." Christ's appearance to these men was well timed. He drew near when it was most necessary; and how speedily was their sorrow turned into joy by His brief converse! Faith revived; hope, joy inexpressible filled their dejected hearts. Back to Jerusalem they went with winged steps to relate in that familiar upper chamber the happiest experience of their life. It is still so. That journey to Emmaus with an unrecognized, yet present Savior is repeating itself to-day in numberless ways in the lives of God's people. Gloom spreads itself over their prospects. A calamity comes and shakes their most cherished plans; wasting disease lays its hand on a loved one, and their homes are draped in mourning. Life has largely lost its charms, and the heart laments in the bitterness of its grief. We walk like yon men of Emmaus and are sad. We reason, Why was I singled out for such sorrow? It is in such

moments that there draws nigh unto us a friend that sticketh closer to us than a brother, One born for adversity, whose voice in the nights of distress is: "Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me." No experience so calamitous that He cannot lighten it; no bereavement so sore that He cannot soothe it; no loss so heavy that He cannot repair it. We may not be able to explain the philosophy of it, but so it is.

Look at that poor widow, for instance. Concrete examples come to my mind. She has been deprived of her main support and left to fight life's battle alone; it is the Emmaus journey of grief that she is called upon to travel. But though the pathway is lonely, and the night is dark, the sunshine of heaven is in her heart, and courage mans her efforts as she looks into the faces of her fatherless children, for she knows there is One with her, invisible, yet truly, wonderfully to sustain, comfort, and lighten her troubles, and the darkness of night becomes light. But, alas! how often does it happen, as with these travelers, that, when He comes to us, we fail to recognize Him! Not as if His bodily presence, His visible form, and His audible voice were now vouchsafed to us; but He makes Himself known to us in a hundred ways. Though disguised, He meets us in our path. He may join us during the day, as we are following the labors of our hands. He may appear in the quiet evening hour, when the frame is weary and the spirit low. He may steal into our bedchamber in the still hour of night, when the door is shut, but the heart open. That stranger next to whom you sat and who engaged you in conversation and spoke a word in season that fired your spirit, who was he? That text from Holy Scripture which rose to your memory and kept ringing in your ears, whence came it? As you directed your footsteps toward God's house this morning, could you not conceive of Him meeting you in the way and fastening His approving eye upon you as if saying, "Quo vadis?" "Whither goest thou?" As you lift up your thoughts in prayer, daily converse with Him, as you kneel here at His altar, partaking of the Sacrament, who is it that reassures your doubting heart, that encourages and cheers you on your way? There is no end of variety in the divine appearances to man. If we would but open our spiritual eyes aright, we would find that our life is full of God. Alas! that we are so much like Thomas, so much like the two travelers to Emmaus, slow to recognize His divine presence, to take home to ourselves the comfort and joy,

and to experience the burning of heart that comes from the open vision and the embracing of our privileges.

Be assured of one thing from the narrative — it pains Him to see His people downcast and sad, and He is ever at their side as they walk along the pilgrimage of life to comfort and cheer.

And concluding, it was at their journey's end, toward evening, the day being far spent, that Jesus revealed Himself fully. So with us. When the evening of life draws near and our mortal day is far spent, there is One whom we shall need to abide with us as we pass down into that dark and shadowy vale. If ever, then, "when other helpers fail and comforts flee," — and we have His own divine assurance for it, — He will be with us; His rod and His staff will comfort us. Nor only that. He Himself will be clearly revealed. The glimpses we have of Him here are but the foretastes of that unclouded vision. Our Christian pathway is mingled light and darkness, alternate sunshine and shade. One day this will be changed. Instead of occasional and partial glories we shall in unclouded vision behold Him as He is, and He will no more vanish from our sight. Our eyes will be opened, and we shall know Him, our risen, reigning, adorable Savior. He will abide with us forever and we with Him. Hallelujah! Amen.

Second Sunday after Easter.

He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand. — *Ps. 95, 7.*

This is the Sunday of the Good Shepherd. From time immemorial has it been so called. A more fitting and attractive illustration of our Lord could not have been chosen. There is none more frequently used and universally appreciated. In the early days of Christianity, when the hand of persecution drove the followers of Christ down into the catacombs, those vast underground passages and burial-places beneath the city of Rome, there was one figure above all others which they delighted to draw in rude outlines upon the walls of these vaults, namely, that of the Good Shepherd. Wherever we go to-day in our own land or in the lands of other Christians, in paintings, in carved stone-work, and in beautiful stained windows, it is the emblem of the Good Shepherd, bearing a lamb in His arms and surrounded by the sheep, that meets our vision. Scarce is there a home in which Christ is known

and loved where you do not see the selfsame image. And correspondingly do we find in the Scriptures God's people compared to sheep, the one relation naturally springing from the other.

What subject could be more appropriate for our contemplation in holy assembly this morning! Two chief thoughts does the text set forth: —

1. A few characteristics of God's people as sheep.
2. The provident and protecting care of the Shepherd.

1.

True Christians, then, are compared to sheep. In what sense does that describe their character? Let us see. Invariably do we connect with the idea of sheep a meek and gentle disposition. Not that every sheep at all times exhibits those amiable traits, — sometimes quite the contrary, — but in the main these qualities are characteristic of sheep. They are the most harmless, quiet, inoffensive creatures that God has created; we apply to them the adjectives gentle and meek. So should it be with Christians. Not that every one at all times exhibits a mild and gentle disposition, but in the main it is a characteristic trait. Christians are disciples and followers of a Master who said: "Learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart." It is recorded of Him in Isaiah: "He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth." And the Apostle Peter in to-day's epistle says of Him: "Who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not, but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously." And since Christ's people partake of the nature of their Master, they, too, partake of His meekness and gentleness. His religion tames, subdues, quiets the unholy passions and outbursts of their turbulent nature. We know how Saul of Tarsus, sworn enemy of the disciples of Christ, ravening wolf that he was, breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, met by Jesus when he was near Damascus, became a subdued and peaceable sheep. And what His Gospel and religion did for him it will do for all.

Christians should be known as persons of a very gentle and loving spirit, who would injure no one by word or deed. They ought to show forth in their lives and outward conversation that the Holy Ghost has given them a new nature, that He has taken away their old corrupt disposition and planted in them godly

thoughts, purposes, and desires. When, therefore, we see people, even professedly Christian people, biting and devouring one another, saying and doing uncharitable things, acting rudely and passionately, getting evil-tempered and angry on the slightest provocation, full of envy and strife and criticism, reluctant to make peace and live in peace, surely we are justified in saying of such people, whatever their lip profession may be, and however fair the clothing of religiousness: "You do not belong to Christ's flock. Yours is not the spirit of the lamb, but of the wolf. We do not see in you the disposition which is so acceptable with Him, and which He requires when He says in one of the Beatitudes: "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

Again, sheep love to be together. We associate with the idea of sheep that of a flock. "Fear not, little flock," Christ said to His disciples, "for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom." In the 34th chapter of Ezekiel, God, speaking of His people, says: "I will feed My flock, and I will cause them to lie down." It is the disposition of sheep to live thus in flocks. The habit of solitude is said to be a general characteristic of rapacious animals. The hawk or the owl may be seen flying alone through the air or sitting pensively on its perch. The lion and the fox prowl in solitude through the forests in search of prey. Not so the sheep. They congregate and cling to each other's company. And so it is with true Christians. Not as if God's people separated themselves from the world and lived in communities and cities set apart especially for the saints. Christians and non-Christians mix and mingle in the same sphere and not infrequently sit around the same fireside and table. But though they thus socially mingle, there is in them, just as in the nature of sheep, a tendency to draw and locate near to each other in Christian intercourse, Christian worship, Christian sympathy. Prompted thus by this impulse, they organize themselves into a congregation, have their names enrolled on a common roster, build a house of worship where they habitually and at appointed seasons join in mutual services, and wait upon their Lord. They do not assemble in this holy place simply as human beings, but as Christians, drawn by the tie that binds their hearts together. It is a principle with them, even as in sheep some instinct prompts them to live in flocks.

"We cannot understand what enjoyment you find in constantly running to church, and why you take such interest in meeting to-

gether," is the remark of those who do not come to the house of God; it is all foolishness to them. Certainly, we understand very well, for they know nothing of the mystical union of believers, of the divine principle that prompts true Christians to congregate, even faith and love toward the same Master, whose servants and members they are, so that they never feel happier than when they are associated with those who share their own deepest convictions, and take a lively interest in that which is the very life-breath of their souls.

But again, sheep are most useful animals; especially were they so to the people whom our Lord addressed in those times; no creature was to them more serviceable; the sheep was so necessary in every way for their comforts and conveniences. Much of their livelihood depended upon the meat supply and wool received from the sheep. And such should be the character of every true Christian. We must study to be useful in our day and generation. For that purpose God has given us tongues; as sheep of Christ's flock we should use them for our neighbor's profit whenever occasion is offered, to speak a Christian word to him. And oh, a word spoken in season, how good it is! How far it goes to counsel and persuade, to warn and entreat against sin and carelessness, and to win for Christ and His kingdom!

For that purpose God has given us our means. Oh, for the service that a proper, proportionate, and conservative giving of our means renders in the great things and the scores of different ways to extend the Redeemer's cause.

For that purpose God has bestowed some special endowment, some individual qualification, for Christian usefulness and service upon every one, as the apostle declares: "Every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, another after that." And no one can have much real Christianity about him or about her who does not endeavor to use that gift of God, whether it be the talent of song or music, skill in needlework, financial talent, or educational, teaching qualifications; whether it be the ability to administer and preside or to render the services of God's house agreeable by waiting upon the worshipers. Let it be written on our minds that Christ expects His sheep to be serviceable, that there are none who cannot do much; and those who belong to Christ's flock will strive to do much; not only something, but much. It is their heart's delight to serve to the very maximum.

2.

Once again. Sheep, of all creatures, are the most helpless and dependent. They need some one to lead them, to stand by them in danger, and to protect them. There are animals much smaller and feebler than sheep that live whether we take care of them or not. The bee, for instance, is very small, but it does not need our aid in order to find the flowers and gather its winter supply. The ants, smaller still, build their own houses and lay up their own provisions, while other tiny creatures, such as the wasp, will fight their own battles. But the sheep we must take care of.

So it is with Christ's flock — the bravest of them, the best of them, and all of them. We need but think of that memorable night in the Garden of Gethsemane, when the Shepherd was smitten, how the sheep were scattered abroad. They all forsook Him and fled. In temporal affairs, in carnal things, we may possess more or less of the lion nature, but when it comes to fighting spiritual battles, particularly when we are left alone, we are shorn of our teeth and our claws, and, oh, how easily we turn aside! No matter how well housed and taken care of, it is the disposition of the sheep to stray, to break through the slightest opening, to get out, and to wander and wander, until they are either recovered or have fallen a prey to some ravenous animal. In view of this fact none but a kind and watchful shepherd will do. And such a Shepherd, thanks to God's infinite goodness, has been provided for us. Says the psalmist: "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want." Says Christ: "I am the Good Shepherd"; not only the Shepherd, but the Good Shepherd, that is, the faithful, loving, self-sacrificing Shepherd, who, when Justice, like an angry wolf, was pursuing the flock, gave Himself up to satisfy its demands and, standing between us and danger, was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. And as He delivered them, as He says in the Gospel-lesson, He laid down His life for them. So, as a considerate and provident Shepherd, He feeds them and protects them. Those are the two outstanding thoughts of the text: "We are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand."

Which are the pastures? What other than the Sacred Volume, the Word of God, ever rich with its gracious provisions, which are never exhausted. Here is food and drink for all hungry and thirsty souls, bread enough and to spare for all famishing souls. Though multitudes of commentators have considered them, and myriads of Christians have studied them, yet these pastures never

become barren in time nor bare by use. They are as "green" and as tender and nutritious to-day as when they were first issued by the Holy Ghost. And when by faith we follow the Good Shepherd into these pastures, when we partake of their heavenly teachings and truth, then we shall have peace and provender, rest and refreshment, serenity and satisfaction.

Nor must we overlook "the still waters," that precious, life-giving washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, as St. Paul calls it. And that other Sacrament, of which the Christian poet says:—

> In the battle well-nigh worsted,
> For this cup of life have thirsted,
> For the Friend who here invites us
> And to God Himself unites us,

gives us the unspeakable gift and soul-food of Christ's body and blood. What sublime provisions! Oh, that Christ's sheep would only do what the psalmist directs, namely, "Lie down in them"; not only pass through them at the most, nibbling off a little leaf here and picking up a herb there, but repose in them and graze upon them, take in a rich and full supply of them, and let the Good Shepherd lead them, and not by indifference, neglect, and worldliness turn their backs upon "the still waters."

Bountifully does the Lord provide for the people of His pasture. And securely do they rest in His hand. How many an hour is spent in anxious foreboding, fretting, and distrust! We are often tempted to worry about the prospects and welfare of ourselves and those who are dear to us. Christ's sheep are inclined to forget that the Good Shepherd takes a living and loving interest in the most trivial matters connected with their every-day life. It ought not so to be. And one of the surest tests of real trust in Christ is freedom from anxiety, for they are in His hand.

To quote a familiar story: One bitter January night the inhabitants of the town of Schleswig were thrown into the greatest distress and terror. A hostile army was marching against them, and new and fearful reports of the conduct of the lawless soldiery were hourly reaching the place. In a large, commodious cottage dwelt an aged grandmother. While all hearts quaked with fear, she passed her time in prayer, asking God to build a wall of defense round about them and quoting the words of an ancient hymn. Her skeptical grandson scoffed at such an idea as being utterly impossible. She explained that her meaning only was that God should

protect them. What happened? At midnight the dreaded tramp of the soldiers was heard, but never a knock came to the door of the grandmother and her grandson, at which they were greatly surprised; but still more so when morning light made the matter clear. Then they saw a sight that thrilled them. Around the house the drifted snow had reared such a massive wall that it was impossible for the soldiers to get over it to their cottage. "There," exclaimed the aged saint triumphantly, "do you not see, my child, that God could raise up a wall around us?"

It is such faith in the Good Shepherd which brings blessings from above and gives to the heart a feeling of comfort which no words can describe, and which nothing but He, the Good Shepherd, can give.

God grant, my dear hearers, that each of you may fix your thoughts on that Good Shepherd, that you may be sheep after the description set forth in the first part of our sermon, meek and gentle, useful and reliant, abiding faithfully in that enclosure which He Himself has provided and fitted out at such great expense and sacrifice, and where He has promised to supply and guard His flock, even His Church,

Till within those folds eternal
We shall find a resting-place,
Feed in pastures ever vernal,
Drink the rivers of His grace.

Amen.

Third Sunday after Easter.

The joy of the Lord is your strength. — *Neh. 8, 10.*

This Sunday, the third after Easter, is styled Jubilate. The Latin word Jubilate means, Rejoice ye! A most precious, pertinent prescription, annually presented, it is! We shall find our text in accord with it. The circumstances under which the words of our text were spoken are these: A great assembly was met to listen to Ezra, the priest, as he read and expounded to them the Law of the Lord. Imagine to yourselves the congregation! On a raised platform, here called a pulpit, stands the servant of God with the parchment-roll in his hand. As he opens the roll, the people reverently rise to their feet; which, by the way, teaches us that the custom of our Church to stand when the Word of God is being

read dates back as far as the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, some seven hundred years before Christ. Having read the Scriptures, he expounds them to his hearers, setting forth the goodness and mercy of their God, how after seventy years of captivity He had brought them home to the land of their fathers, and urging them to put away their sinful neglect of God and His ordinances. The effect was marvelous. Tears of sorrow as well as of joy came to their eyes. Nehemiah then exclaimed: "Weep not; this is a day of gladness and thanksgiving; eat, drink, and be merry." Let every one give himself, with gratitude and in a festive mood, to enjoy the good things, the brightness and blessedness of this festival occasion, it being the Feast of Tabernacles; "for," added he, "the joy of the Lord is your strength." And the people did as they were told. The assembly broke up, and its scattered members went away to observe great mirth.

So it is likewise with our holy religion. When God created the world, He divided the day into evenings and mornings and set certain times and seasons. Thus church life, too, has its seasons of alternate sorrow and joy, of penitence and thanksgiving; after Lent with its litany and *miserere* follows Easter with its hallelujah and jubilee. In our Christian life, the period when we chant: —

> Savior, when in dust to Thee
> Low we bow th' adoring knee,
> When, repentant, to the skies
> Scarce we lift our weeping eyes,

is followed by the day when we exult: —

> Awake, my heart, with gladness,
> See what to-day is done,
> How after gloom and sadness
> Comes forth the glorious Sun!
> My Savior there was laid
> Where our bed must be made
> When to the realms of light
> Our spirit wings its flight.

Hence this Sunday has been appointed in Eastertide to impress upon our minds that Christianity is a religion of joy. The Christian ought to be the happiest, the sunniest, most cheerful person dwelling on the face of the earth. To that would we devote a few moments of sacred reflection, regarding

1. The reasons, or grounds, we Christians have for rejoicing;
2. The strength which such rejoicing gives us.

1.

As to the grounds, or reasons, we Christians have for rejoicing, these are manifold and numerous indeed. To begin with the First Article of our Creed. We rejoice that there is a God, — yes, that there is a God; that this world is not an orphan nor a plaything cast abroad into the vast expanse of this universe by a blind, merciless Supreme Power, called Force, Chance, Fate, or such like, but that it has been made, and is still governed, by a personal, almighty, loving Provider and Protector, whom we are privileged to call Father. Not all men believe this, and most men have a very imperfect conception of this. As for us, we hold that there sits at the helm of human affairs a Governor whose wisdom is unerring and whose control is supreme; that never a thing happens and never an event befalls us, down to the minutest detail of our life, but He has arranged it, permitted it, and that it must ultimately work out for good to those that love Him. And under such a persuasion the Christian walks the pathway of life with a light heart and buoyant step, free from cankering care and undue anxiety. No finer practise, more tranquillizing and joy-instilling, can we commend than to recite regularly to yourselves the meaning of the First Article as you have learned it from the Catechism: "I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still preserves them; . . . that He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life; that He defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil." Happy the man, the woman, who has this knowledge and holds fast to this conviction!

Again, according to the Second Article of our Creed we rejoice that we have a Savior. We need such a Savior as spoken of in the Second Article. Without Him, outside of Him, there can be no true joy and happiness. Why? Because there is such a thing as sin. A most terrible, ruinous, destructive reality it is, the source of all misery and unhappiness. There can be no solid comfort while a man is ill at ease respecting his condition in the sight of God. Whatever earthly blessings may crown his lot, this variance between man and his Maker is the bitter drop which converts the whole contents of the cup into wormwood and gall. But Heaven has sent One who is mighty to save and strong to deliver; who bore our penalty and atoned for our sins, who, by shedding His holy, precious blood and by His innocent suffering and death, closed up

the breach between God and sinful man, so that, when we think of the transcending treasures of blessedness, deliverance, and redemption we have in Christ Jesus, think from what degradation He has lifted us, to what honors and favors He has brought us, every pulse in our body should awake and our hearts leap with highest exultation. Happy the man, the woman, that has found and fondly embraces the Savior!

Let us turn to the Third Article. Are we Christians? Who has made us such? For we cannot by our own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ or come to Him. Are we members of Christ's Church? Through whose operation have we entered into that blessed fellowship? Who has furnished us, by His inspiration, this Holy Volume, which if any man read and know, he cannot be unhappy? Who gives efficacy to Christian service, with which so much blessedness is connected? Who helps us in, and gives power to, our prayers and aids us in our Christian life? We have according to that article a home to look to — a glorious prospect! —

> Yonder's my home and portion fair;
> My treasure and my heart are there.

And when this body, so full of aches and ills and symptoms of decay, will break asunder, the healing hand of God's almightiness will fashion it into a glorious, unfading tenement of our immortal soul. Such hopes and excellencies here and hereafter! Are they not abundant reason for us to rejoice, to exalt daily and fervently: "Thank God that I am a Christian and possess such cheering hope and strong consolation"?

2.

And this joy of the Lord, declares our text, is "your strength." It is that in manifold ways. There never was a time when men were more eager for enjoyment than now. No labor is too great, no journey too long, no expense too much, if entertainment can be had. Theaters abound in numbers unparalleled. Passionately do young and old devote themselves to pleasure-seeking, sports, and all that this means. Never did amusements bulge more largely in the eyes of the people, never were they so much thought about, spoken about, written about, and read about. Not as if we would say that a reasonable amount of enjoyment of the things of this world is contrary to joy in the Lord, that our religion shuts us out from innocent recreations of a merely secular sort. As we behold the scenes of awakening spring, when the earth is again arrayed in her garment of tender verdure, when the trees and shrubs put

forth their blossoms and buds, when the birds chirp on every side, when nature manifests her rejuvenating power, what eyes sparkle not with joy at these beauties of the physical world! So with the delights of music and art and the various forms of physical recreation and exercise.

To be a Christian does not mean to surrender and cast aside all secular enjoyment, to go into a monastery and pass through life with a perpetual moan and groan, to be a weeping willow. To be a Christian and to rejoice in the Lord means that I am ever conscious whose I am and whom I have vowed to serve; that everything else is made subservient, secondary, and brought in fitting harmony with one's Christian character and conduct. There is no reason why we may not enjoy innocent recreation and diversion, but we must never allow these things to divert us from the one great object of our Christian calling. We do this whenever we allow amusements and entertainment to usurp a foremost place in our minds and lives, when we permit them to enlist attention and time and means to an extent which excludes and supplants what should mostly and supremely command the interest and regard of a Christian. There is a danger here into which many are drifting. A visit to the playhouse is looked forward to with more delight than a visit to God's house. To have "a good time" engrosses the thoughts of many more than how they can worship and glorify God and serve a world so full of ignorance, suffering, and sin.

To become a little more specific by citing examples from pastoral life: A mother secretly told me with tears in her eyes that her son's downward course began from the time that he joined a certain fishing club in which were evil associates, who did no little drinking. Another parent attributed the backsliding of her son to the fact that he joined a cycling club. With the opening of outdoor pastimes how frequently inquiry leads to the information that absence from services is due to one's belonging to a team that plays ball on Sunday, and thus the day regarding which the Third Commandment says that it should be sanctified, on which we should build up our faith and feed our immortal souls by hearing the Word of God, is shamefully and wilfully neglected, and, besides, offense is given to fellow-Christians by our non-attendance. The same pertains to automobiling. What perversion may diversion be put to!

All that has been said is in line with the solemn warning and

admonition of the apostle in to-day's epistle: "I beseech you, as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul."

A Christian must never forget that he is, above all else, before all else, a Christian; and he ought to show it in his deportment, also in matters of recreation, amusements and pastimes. And where there is real joy in the Lord, it will prove his strength in this respect. It will direct him to do what is proper and becoming.

Again, "the joy of the Lord is your strength" in working for Him. God has work for each one of us to do. With one it is to stand in the pulpit and declare the Gospel and the promises of God to His people. With another it is to stand in the workshop and commend religion by showing as a Christian that he is as careful of the employer's time and material as if it were his own. With still others it is as mothers and wives, who are to exemplify Christian virtues in their homes and bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. In the Church of God it means to give of our time, talents, influence, and means in the Sunday-school, in the societies, in the charitable organizations, so that the work of the Lord does not lag and the congregation fulfils its position and power as the instrument and agency of God for the salvation of men. Of such work there is much to do; and what is to inspire us to do it in the face of oft-time discouragements and disappointments? The joy of the Lord, answers the text, is your strength.

The feeling that we are permitted to do something for Him who has done and is doing everything for us, to whom we owe our creation, redemption, and sanctification; the delight that attaches to being instrumental in bringing one single soul to Christ and heaven; and the pleasure of supporting and sustaining the noblest institution under the sun, the Church, which is the greatest power for good in the world, which, if taken away or abridged, would mean the most serious harm that could befall family and country, morals and good order, to say nothing of our own souls, ought this not to fire our hearts and give us joy and strength to pray fervently, to employ all our means and powers, and to use all our influence to sustain and push forward the Church and God's cause, wherever and as much as we can? It is to that very purpose that our gifts have been given us. We are here to do all that makes for salvation and good, and we are dull and blind to the highest interests of our soul if we do not find joy in doing this and if we do not

other acknowledges them as having come from God. "Soul," said the rich worldling in the parable, "soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years." Says St. Paul: "What hast thou that thou didst not receive?" Pontius Pilate asked Christ: "Knowest Thou not that I have power to crucify Thee and have power to release Thee?" Christ replied: "Thou couldest have no power at all against Me except it were given thee from above." A simple distinction, yet an important and significant one, perhaps never more deserving of emphasis than at the present time, when people are in danger of forgetting it; for they carry their heads aloft and fail to give due honor to Him to whom it belongs.

But there are higher and more excellent gifts than those which have been mentioned, even as there is a higher and more excellent sphere. Man was not created for this world only and therefore has received from above gifts not only for this world. One such higher and more excellent gift is the Volume that lies before me, without whose revelations and communications life here below would be a riddle and life hereafter inexplicable darkness. From whom is it? From men? It was written by men, but there is a higher Power that inspired their thoughts and guided their pen. As we sing: "How precious is the Book Divine, by inspiration given!"

Again, there is that gift on which all other gifts depend and to which all other gifts are related as their center and chief, the gift spoken of when it says: "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son," Christ Jesus, our adorable Lord and Savior. He is preeminently God's Gift to man.

But there is yet another gift that stands inseparably linked with Christ and His blessed work, and to that the Church in the course of her holy instruction directs our contemplation at this time. As our eyes during these forty days of Eastertide turn from that empty grave in Joseph's garden to yonder rising form on Olivet's hill, we hear our Lord's utterance as given in to-day's gospel: "It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you." Now, who is this Comforter, this good and perfect Gift from above, but the third person of the adorable Trinity, the Holy Ghost? Of the work and offices of that divine Person does this Sunday's sermon treat. As an example we have chosen the account of the Ethiopian eunuch for our text. To its consideration may God grant devout attention and His blessing!

Six hundred years before the occurrence here narrated the prophet Zephaniah had declared: "From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia suppliants shall bring offerings." David before that had sung: "Princes shall come out of Egypt. Ethiopia shall stretch out her hands unto God." With the rise of Christianity these prophecies were being fulfilled. Here was a "prince" come out of Egypt; an Ethiopian stretching forth his hands as a suppliant unto God. The account is: "Behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure and had come to Jerusalem for to worship." It is supposed that knowledge of the true God Jehovah had been carried into Ethiopia nine hundred years previously by the Queen of Sheba after her visit to King Solomon. But, however obtained, his religious knowledge did not permit the eunuch to rest until he had journeyed to Jerusalem and seen in God's own city and Temple how He was worshiped. The worship being over, he was now on his way back. Wishing to employ his time profitably, he was reading, as he traveled, the prophet Esaias, commonly called Isaiah. But the book was too deep for him; ignorance still clouded his mind. He did not understand it. Then it was that the Holy Spirit came to his aid. He directs His minister, the deacon Philip: "Go near and join thyself to this chariot." He obeyed, "ran," is the term, and while proceeding along the desert highway, he heard a voice as of some one reading aloud. He recognized the Scriptures read aloud by the eunuch, the 53d chapter of Isaiah, and courteously asked, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" "How can I," answered the occupant of the chariot, "except some man should guide me?" "And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him." The passage of Scripture which he read was this: "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened He not His mouth. In His humiliation His judgment was taken away; and who shall declare His generation? For His life is taken from the earth." The eunuch then said to Philip, "I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this, of himself or of some other man?"

Here was a most suitable text, a fine opportunity for Philip, and he availed himself of it. Most fascinatingly does it say: "Then Philip opened his mouth and began at the same scripture and preached unto him Jesus." Line after line, winged by the Spirit of God, Philip explained that Old Testament passage, showing who it was that was led as a sheep to the slaughter and as

a lamb before His shearer was dumb, who in His humiliation was deprived of His right of judgment, and whose life was taken from the earth. And what was the effect produced?

"And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water. And the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?" And Philip said, "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest." And he answered, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." "And he commanded the chariot to stand still. And they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him."

And when the ceremony was over, when Philip's work was done, what strange occurrence! "The Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip that the eunuch saw him no more. And he went on his way rejoicing," back into his native land.

From this attractive narrative, so rich in lessons, we would learn a few particulars in respect to the work of the Holy Ghost. No one can carefully read this account without being impressed with the Spirit's interest and efforts in behalf of this man. Who was it that prompted him to leave his own country and travel that great and dangerous distance of seven hundred miles to witness the worship of the true God? Who was it that led him to purchase that expensive parchment of Isaiah and to read its sacred contents? Who gave direction to Philip, "Go near and join thyself to this chariot"? Who opened the page to that fruitful 53d chapter of Isaiah? Who spirited Philip away when his work was completed? And while these and other features might appear extraordinary because of the extraordinary conditions prevailing, let us remember that the Spirit exerts Himself thus with respect to every immortal soul. We have no reasons from which to infer that the Holy Spirit has any particular favorites upon whom, to the exclusion of others, He is especially desirous of conferring His gifts and blessings. What He did toward and for this eunuch He is ready and willing to do toward and for any. Externally and internally does He still thus operate, arrange and shape events, influence and convert men's souls. And very forcibly and plainly does the narrative bring out how He does this.

The eunuch, sitting in his chariot, was reading, and what was he reading? A book on philosophy, a dissertation on statesmanship or politics, or perchance a novel, or a traveler's description of the beautiful country through which he was passing? We have heard what engaged his attention. He was reading the prophet Isaiah,

a portion of the Bible. There is a wonderful connection between that Book and the Spirit of God. He inspired it. "Holy men of God spake [and wrote] as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." It is His Book, for which reason it is different from all other books and deserves a consideration different from all other books. God is speaking to you in this Book. See, then, my dear hearer, that you copy the conduct of the eunuch. How much more easily you may do so! In those days Bibles were most expensive, as they had all to be written out by hand, and most unwieldy, being scrolls of parchment wound about a staff; now we can secure them at a trifling cost, in size small enough to fit into the pocket. But of what value is the Bible, no matter how easily procured and how cheap and handy, if it is not read? It is by reading it that the Spirit of God works in men's hearts, enlightens their eyes, and opens their understanding, so that they behold the wondrous things there revealed. Blush, Christians, blush, all those of you who neglect to read that Book which is the only source of the true religion, the only guide to heaven, who never, like the eunuch, sit and ponder the Word of God! Then do not wonder that you feel so little of its effects in your hearts and lives.

Again does the Spirit of God work through the instrumentality of men. The Spirit of God could have taught the eunuch and opened the eyes of his understanding without the aid of Philip, had He so pleased. He might have employed an angel to do it, the same angel whom He commanded to tell Philip to arise and go toward the south. But such was not His method. He employed the ministry of man. Philip must do the explaining. It is still so. God works through persons. He has established a ministry. Not by chance or by our own choosing do we stand in these pulpits. There is a divinity in our calling. The same Spirit who said to Philip, "Go near and join thyself to this chariot," says to us, "Go near and join thyself to this congregation." We have fallen on times where some have little or no use for the Christian ministry, neglect its ministrations, and speak belittlingly of its incumbents. Not so does God look upon it. Paul says: "It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." Let men avoid being wiser than the all-wise God.

On the other hand, let the pulpit never forget what should be the core, the substance, and central matter of its discourse. Admirably does it say of Philip: "He preached unto him Jesus." In simple exposition he proved to the eunuch that Jesus of

Nazareth was indeed the Messiah, the Savior of the world. That is the supreme theme of address still, if the ministry is to fulfil its purpose. We must preach Jesus, our sermons must be Biblical. For us to offer, and for you to expect, what might be just as appropriate on the platform, in the lecture-hall, and in the class-room, from a professor of philosophy, is improper and will not bring about what the Christian ministry has been designed for. The magnet, the secret power, under the Spirit's influence, that draws men's hearts to salvation and heaven, is here: "He preached unto him Jesus." If that does not draw, nothing will; if anything else draws, it is only transitory, fading, unavailing.

And one other way, as the text points out, does the Spirit of God work. This is a consideration of no minor importance. "See, here is water, what doth hinder me to be baptized?" said the eunuch to Philip. Philip had preached unto him Jesus, had informed him regarding the integral, essential parts of the religion of Jesus Christ. What did such preaching include? Why, when the eunuch saw the water, did he immediately ask to be baptized? Evidently Philip must have taught him that Baptism belonged to the first things of Christ's religion. And on the first Pentecost, when Peter had preached, and when, as St. Luke relates, his hearers were pricked in their hearts and said to Peter and to the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" what did he answer? Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them: "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." What need we further witness that the Holy Ghost works in and through Baptism? Can we conceive a more sacred and solemn scene than was enacted in that quiet spot by the roadside on the way that leads down from Jerusalem to Gaza — the eunuch standing in the water, the evangelist reverently administering the Sacrament, the witnesses of the act, the servants of the Ethiopian and the angels of God? A pity that even some Christian denominations regard Baptism so lightly, speaking of it as being merely a rite of initiation into the Church. Truthfully and Scripturally do we call it a Christianizing; we hold that by it we become Christians, that the Spirit operates in and through Holy Baptism. As St. Paul says, Titus, chapter third: "It is the washing of regeneration [of the new birth] and renewing of the Holy Ghost."

Surely none can read this narrative without learning that

Baptism belongs to the first of Christian duties, a means by which we are received into fellowship with Jesus, enter into that covenant which unites man with the Triune God, makes him a member of His Church and an heir of salvation. These, then, are the means through which the Spirit of God carries on His work in our hearts: through His Word, read in this Volume and preached by His ministry, and through the holy Sacraments.

The story ends: "And he [the eunuch] went on his way rejoicing," uplifted, happy. He had obtained what he desired: peace with God, satisfaction of heart and mind — the most valuable possessions that a person can obtain in this world and for the next. And what he obtained we also may obtain if we are as mindful of religion, as earnest and conscientious as he, yielding ourselves to the influence of God's Spirit in the means mentioned.

As to what finally became of the Ethiopian eunuch, we know nothing positive. Eusebius, the first Christian historian, informs us that he was instrumental in bringing many to Christ in his native country. The Abyssinians, say travelers and geographers, to this day venerate his memory, and at every ministration of baptism relate with pious gratitude the story of his conversion.

How else could it have been? When God's Spirit has called us by the Gospel, enlightened us with His gifts, and sanctifies us, we cannot but be witnesses for Him, helpers together with Him, to lead others to the same salvation and blessedness vouchsafed to us.

May the earnestness, the happy and the blessed zeal of the Ethiopian eunuch, through the working of God's Spirit in our hearts and lives, be ours! Amen.

Fifth Sunday after Easter.

The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit. — *Jas. 5, 16—18.*

The name of this Sunday, given in the church calendar as "Rogate," and the appointment of its Scripture-lessons present to us the subject of prayer. It is an important subject. Prayer is the supreme necessity of the Christian's life. No one is a Christian who does not pray. From the moment when the soul, turning

in penitence to God, exclaims, "God be merciful to me, a sinner!" until the hour when, at the gates of paradise, the dying saint petitions, "Lord Jesus, receive my soul," communion with God is the vital breath of the soul. To widen out the subject: Prayer is universal. Like our belief in the existence of the soul or in man's responsibility, there seems to be lodged in every one's breast what we may call an instinct to pray. Never yet did a traveler find a nation upon the face of the earth that did not use prayer in some form. Races have been found without raiment, without houses, without manufactories, but never without prayer, no more than without speech, human features, or human passions. The most degraded Hottentot prays to his fetish, though it be nothing better than a snake or a stick of wood. The Hindu, of whatever rank or caste, bows in adoration before his ugly idol and implores the favor of a thing which can neither help nor harm. The polished Greeks and Romans, with more esthetic taste, offered their supplications to sculptured statues of beauty and grandeur. But whatever be the form, no age, no nation, no religion has ever existed without prayer, and it may well be doubted whether any individual has ever lived to mature age who has not at some time or other, in some way or other, offered prayer. It is recorded of Volney, who was one of those frothy and foul-mouthed class of men that love to trumpet into the world that there is no God, that belief in Him is only delusion, and prayer to Him nothing but a base superstition, and imposition of priestcraft, that with this creed he went sailing one day over the unruffled surface of Lake Erie. But the scene changed, and with the scene changed his creed. The heavens began to frown, and the deep uttered an angry voice; a dreadful storm broke loose, threatening all with destruction, when, behold, on the deck of the dismantled vessel, with hands uplifted and eyes streaming, there was the notorious infidel, imploring God for mercy. The tempest had blown away his fine-spun speculations like so many cobwebs and made him bend his knees in humble prayer. And Volney is not by any means the only instance. As natural as are to man the feelings which prompt an infant to draw the milk of a mother's breast and by its cries to claim a mother's protection, even so man is, as it were, instinctively moved to cast himself into the arms of God, to seek divine help in times of need, and in times of sorrow to weep on the bosom of a Father who is in heaven.

And yet, even among Christians there is hardly anything which

is less duly appreciated. Too many, in their indifference of heart and lack of faith, regard prayer rather as a bit of drudgery, which they are expected to perform, than as a privilege granted to them by the Almighty One.

And one reason for this, at the bottom of this carelessness and indifference, is the whispering of man's unbelief and blind reason: What is the good of it? What is the use of prayer? Does it actually bring us anything? And it is because they have never honestly and thoroughly examined into the matter that the number of those who diligently seek the face of God has become greatly reduced. That is to be the topic for today: —

The Efficacy and the Worth of Prayer.

Let us note,

1. The statement of our text regarding prayer;
2. The illustration appended.

1.

"The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." Are these not simple words, plain words past all misunderstanding? And yet, what simple and plain words of God's authoritative Scriptures were not met with contradiction and objections? And so with these of our text. God's inspired apostle says: "The prayer availeth much," and that is for man to believe. Yet man, ever skeptical, asks, How so? Does any one really think that by offering a few words of supplication he is going to change the fixed and determined will of God, or that he will make God give him what He would not have given him if he had not prayed? God is unchangeable. He has settled everything beforehand already; for what purpose, then, is prayer? You cannot change the unchangeable. Thus have men with ostensibly superlative wisdom argued.

To show how fallacious and ridiculous such reasoning is, might not the unwilling or lazy farmer in spring ask: "What is the use of sowing? Has not God ordained everything? If I am to have a harvest, a crop is sure to grow on my farm. Therefore, even if no plow turns up a furrow, or a sower walks its fields, they shall wave in autumn with golden corn." Or if a person is sick, might he not say: "God has ordained everything; if, therefore, He has decreed that I am to live, come cholera, fever, pestilence, I shall regain my health if I am taken sick. If He has decreed otherwise,

all the medicine of the druggist and the skill of the physician cannot avail to save me." Did man in his sober senses ever thus reason? So in the matter of prayer. Prayer is one of the means by which God is influenced. It enters into His decrees and governance of the world, just as plowing and sowing does into the yielding of a crop and medicine into recovery from illness. Prayer, it has been correctly expressed, moves the Hand that moves the world. It is like the rope in the belfry: we pull it, and it rings the bell up in heaven. Did He not command us to pray? And why should He have done so if prayer amounts to nothing with Him?

But why should we try to refute all the objections which skeptics are wont to cast up? Rather let us rivet your eye and heart upon that which God says, and He says: "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

In what way, we ask, does prayer avail much? It has been said that prayer has a reflex action; that means to say that it is a healthful and salutary exercise of the mind and soul, that it does one's own self good to pray. That is true. Prayer itself has its own reward. Who that went with a sincere heart to his God has ever come away without some comfort, peace, satisfaction, and relief? We may hear no voice, no audible sounds in the air, see no visions, experience no special thrill or sensation in body or soul, yet somehow there comes after it a peaceful quiet in our souls, something that serves to lift off the burdens of the soul, that refreshes and invigorates the fainting heart, lifts up out of despondency and bitterness into courageous resolve and joyous confidence and hope. It is one of the most blessed privileges we mortals have, that, amid the many trials and needs of this adverse and afflicted world, we may at any time go direct to our heavenly Father, unbosom ourselves to Him as we cannot even to the dearest earthly friend, and feel comforted, strengthened, and assured. Alas for any soul that fails to use this privilege! However, that is not, at least not only, what the holy writer had in mind, this salutary influence of prayer. No, he evidently says that we really receive things in answer to prayer, after the manner in which our Lord says: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."

It may be well to look carefully at the text. What the apostle says is that "prayer availeth much." He does not say that it avails to the full extent that the petitioner wishes it to avail; he does

not affirm that it will accomplish precisely what is asked for by the petitioner; but he affirms that it "avails much." It may be in this way, it may be in that way, but in some way it "avails much." In other words, every prayer that goes out of a Christian's heart avails something, yes, much. It brings results, produces effects, nets returns, accomplishes its purpose. God hears every Christian's prayer. That does not mean that He gratifies his every wish. Our wishes are not always for our good, and no one knows that better than the all-knowing God, to whom we pray, and who loves us too well to supply what is not for our good. Thus you pray for prosperity, but you may not get it. You pray for the recovery of a sick friend or child, for the removal of a cross or burden, but your wish is not gratified. What then? Do the words, "availeth much," fail? No, for it does avail. You do not obtain that particular thing, but if you go on praying, God invariably gives something better, though not what you have set your heart upon — what according to His purpose is for your highest possible good, and that in answer to your prayer. Prayer never comes home weeping. I get what I ask for, or what I should have asked for. It is always true: "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

2.

You desire evidence? My beloved, I could furnish it plentifully from one life's story; you, I doubt not, also. But it behooves us in this pulpit to preach God's Volume; and from the many, many instances in which God has heard His people and sent them the blessing which they needed and for which they prayed the apostle adduces one. "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit." The prophet Elijah was a man of high eminence in his day. We are familiar with the great events of his career, and so the apostle, to obviate the objection that from the power of his prayers no conclusion regarding ours could fairly be drawn, remarks: "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are," a man of a nature like other men, with all the weaknesses that belong to humanity as we now find it in the world; and this man Elijah prayed a twofold prayer: that it rain not, and then again, that it rain. And this prayer was heard. It rained not for

the space of three years and six months. And again, the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit. "Wonderful!" you remark. "And would ours be the same answer?" That is the very teaching of the apostle, that is why he mentions this example. Indeed, ours would be the same answer, provided ours would be the same prayer. What was Elijah's prayer? The apostle tells us: It was the prayer of a righteous man, and it was fervent prayer.

"The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." Who is a righteous man? A righteous man is the genuinely pious man, the man who has faith. When such a man prays, he has two things in mind: first, the glory of God; secondly, the welfare of his fellow-men. That is what Elijah had in mind. The withholding of rain at that time in Israel, when there was such an idolatrous falling away from God, such a defiance against Him, Elijah felt, would show that God's name and honor must not be dishonored and treated with contempt, and by such a visitation Israel would be awakened to repentance and turn again to the true God Jehovah. So he offered his prayer against the blessing of rain, and it was answered. And in the same spirit he afterwards prayed for rain; and this prayer was equally as successful. And to him who thus offers prayer, prayer that involves the glory of God and the benefit of his fellow-men, there is the same assurance — "it availeth much." For prayer that would greedily enlist the resources of God for the feeding of its own vanity, for that there is no guarantee in the Scriptures. For prayer that asks God to grant our requests for His glory and our neighbors' welfare there is no limit. Prayer offered up in such faith can draw rain from heaven to-day as well as it did thousands of years ago, so affirms the apostle.

And one other feature connects with effectual prayer, and that is fervency. The . . . fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." Elijah prayed earnestly, it says, that it rain not, and again, that it rain. The sacred account tells us how it was. He went up to Mount Carmel and put his face between his knees and poured forth the full strength of his fervent soul, and so importunate was he that, when the servant whom he had stationed on the hilltop returned with the reply, "There is nothing," it did not dishearten the prophet. He kept on praying.

My beloved, there are many formal, heartless prayers offered, prayers merely of the lips. The prayer which availeth much is

that which is fervent, warm, energetic, earnest. This is the kind of prayer that has the promise. The others are like birds without wings, like arrows without feathers. We must have our heart concentrated on the object of our prayers, else they do not avail much. Oh, for a clearer understanding of a firmer faith in God and a more consistent and habitual practise of communion with Him in prayer. Pray often; pray in Jesus' name; pray earnestly. And in order that your prayer may amount to something, be righteous before God and man, and your prayer will be power, success, heard — so says the God of the Bible. Amen.

Ascension Day.

And He led them out as far as to Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. And it came to pass, while He blessed them, He was parted from them and carried up into heaven. — *Luke 24, 50. 51.*

It is not a little remarkable that the ascension of Christ, our Savior, although in some particulars the most momentous event of His earthly career, is not recorded in two of the four gospels which record the history of His life and the work of redemption. You look in vain for any account of it either in St. Matthew or in St. John. Now, whatever the reason may be, it is not because it ever was a doubtful or disputed matter among the early Christians. St. Paul in his writings speaks of it with the utmost confidence and certainty. And St. Luke not only records it in the gospel bearing his name, but also in the striking scene told in the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, as heard at the lectern. This omission on the part of two holy writers is readily explained if we consider the four gospels not merely transcripts, or repetitions of each other, but as forming together one complete and harmonious whole, the one writer assuming, taking as an accepted fact, what is recorded by the other. Accordingly, there is no discrepancy here, no oversight of an act which was so necessary for the perfecting of the Savior's work.

Minutely and accurately as St. Luke, the historian of the infant Church, as he is aptly called, produces the scene, let us meditate upon the passage before us, regarding a few attendant circumstances connecting with the ascension of our Lord and the purposes accomplished by it.

1.

In the first place, as to the manner of Christ's ascension, we notice that it was visible, public. The same pertains to every scene of our Lord's life. Nothing was done in secret or in a corner. His crucifixion was public. A host of awe-stricken eye-witnesses — great numbers had come to Jerusalem during that month to celebrate the Passover Feast — saw the tragedy enacted upon that hill of shame outside of Jerusalem's gates. His burial was public. The Jews, with jealous watchfulness, pointed to the place where the "impostor" lay; and what meant the guarded sepulcher with its mouth royally sealed, and the armed sentinels pacing to and fro? And so the resurrection was a public and well-known fact. The common mass of events, accepted as historically true, are not one-tenth as well authenticated as the great Easter miracle. During not less than forty days did the Risen One accumulate the indisputable proofs of it and write them indelibly upon the hearts of His disciples. And then with equal publicity, in the broad light of day, from a neighboring mount, amid the assembly of many witnesses, He ascended on high. He was not smuggled into a far-off country; He did not vanish away. No, solemnly, stately, slowly, visibly, publicly, He returned whence He had come forth.

The place in which it happened is worthy of our notice — Bethany. Being a hallowed spot, it was peculiarly fitted for this glorious event. Bethany was on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives. — It was only a village; but so many of the events of the Savior's life took place on this mount or around its base that it might almost be called "the Mountain of our Lord." It was His closet, as it were; for in its clefts He often prayed. It was His pulpit; for on its gently sloping ridge, I am disposed to think, He delivered the Sermon on the Mount. It was a place where He often assembled with His disciples. At the base of the Mount of Olives was their common home, where His presence brought sunshine and comfort into the home of Mary and Martha, and where in relaxation He occasionally found where to lay His head. Tradition shows the spot where the eyes of His body beheld the city, and where the eye of His mind, gazing upon its future, saw its stricken people, its burning palaces, and its sunken Temple, which caused Him to weep over its doom. Underneath that spot lay the garden where His soul had undergone one of its deepest agonies. From the summit of the mount He arose, cleaving the air in conquering triumph. No wonder that of all places of Scrip-

tural events those who love the Lord dwell with fondest memory upon this Mount of Olives, or Olivet.

And thither the Lord led His disciples on this day. In spirit we shall accompany the procession. It is at first small, consisting only of Christ and the eleven. As it passes along, it becomes larger in volume. Little knots of disciples here and solitary persons there annex themselves to it, until it consists of 120 persons. How were they occupied during that memorable walk? Did the divine Teacher continue His instructions, speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God? Did they sing a hymn as they did on that memorable last night of His earthly life, when they went out to Gethsemane? Did they deluge Him with questions like the one recorded: "Wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" We cannot definitely say; perhaps all of this took place.

At last they have reached the crest of the mount. Do they pause? We assuredly would have paused to admire the view that spread itself out before us. There was Jerusalem, with its Temple glittering in the sunshine, a pile of finest marble, fretted with gold, the deep ravine through which the brook Kedron was leaping in its bed of sand and pebbles, the spot at once a garden and a sepulcher, in which He had reposed for three days and nights, the villages of Bethany and Bethphage bathed in the most luxurious green, and in the far distance the Dead Sea and the Mountains of Moab, on one of which Moses had drawn his last breath, entering from there into his eternal reward. Enchanting view! But yonder, staining the azure firmament, approaches a fleecy cloud. The Lord knows its meaning, and so He lifts up His hands, it says, and blesses His disciples. This indeed was His daily work, to dispense blessing. This was the purpose which prompted Him to leave His glorious abode and to come down into this sin-sick, sin-enslaved, perishing world of ours, to be numbered with the transgressors, to be stricken, smitten, and afflicted. What was His life but one continued blessing? When He was at a marriage, the water must blush into wine. When He was in the house of death, it was to prove Himself the Resurrection and the Life. Whenever He was at the wayside, the lepers were cleansed, the deaf heard, the dumb spake, the blind were restored to sight. When He was on the boisterous waters, He would call out, "Peace, be still!" Taking infants into His arms, He blessed them, and the opening words of His public ministry were, "Blessed, blessed," nine times. And

now on this mountain, befitting the close of a life so beautiful and great, He looks with the last glance of love upon His faithful disciples and lifts up His hands to bless them, and ere the tones of His blessing have ceased, He rises together with the cloud that came to take Him and is taken up into heaven. The land below fades away from His view. Olivet and the loftiest peak of the Sinaitic range disappear to His human eye. Through the milky way, through ethereal space, He pursues His course. The last star, which, like a sentinel, keeps its solitary watch, ceases to be seen — upward, ever upward. And then the gates of the Holy City appear flaming with the luster of 10,000 suns. And hark! From the angelic inhabitants comes the hymn of triumph: "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors! And the King of Glory shall come in." Those watching at the gates look over the lofty battlements and ask, "Who is this King of Glory?" To which the archangels reply: "The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. The Lord of hosts, He is the King of Glory." Whereupon the ponderous gates swing open, and the King of Glory, the Man of Nazareth, amidst the acclamation of thousand times thousands and ten thousand times ten thousands, takes His seat upon the right hand of the Majesty on high.

Such is the inspiring theme of this festival devotion, the historical fact of our Lord's ascension. The purpose must claim our further attention.

2.

It is impossible to mention all the purposes of our Lord's ascension. As a general guide we may say they are threefold, personal, representative, and mediatorial.

Personal, that is to say, what did it mean for Him? It meant His glorification, His return to the place whence He had come, the reassuming of that dignity which was ever His, but which for our sakes He had foregone when He was born in a stable and laid in a manger, and ever afterwards for thirty and three years, leading a life of hardships and suffering, and being obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, He laid it aside. But why should He continue to forego it now that the work He had come into this world to do was accomplished? Therefore it was quite proper that the Head once crowned with thorns should be crowned with glory now, that He should return to the bosom of His Father. Accordingly, Ascension Day is Christ's coronation day, the day

when amid the acclamation of its holy occupants He reentered the celestial realm; and we rejoice and are happy with them.

> All hail the power of Jesus' name!
> Let angels prostrate fall;
> Bring forth the royal diadem
> And crown Him Lord of all.

This is its personal significance, its meaning for Him.

Then there are the representative results arising from the ascension of our Lord. Christ is our federal Head, the second great Representative of the human race, the second Adam. By His exaltation we are exalted. We, as it were, stand with the Savior on yonder mount. We see, we recognize, we follow His rising form, until the cloud receives Him and He is beyond the range of our vision. Well, what of that? Let us note that no change passed upon Him in His passage through the air. The spiritual did not despise the material and did not disdainfully, like a worn-out garment, cast aside the body. The whole Redeemer, just as He was and conversed with His disciples and blessed them, ascended upon high, not merely the Son of God, but the Man Christ Jesus. The veil of flesh, the human soul, all that constituted the manhood of Christ, shared the triumph as it had borne the sufferings. He had died as a man on the cross, had He not? He rose as a man, and as a man He cleft the clouds of the air and sat down upon the right hand of His Father, and He is crowned and governs as a man the illimitable worlds. As a man in His glorified body did Stephen see Him when before the Jewish Sanhedrin he exclaimed: "I see the heavens open and the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Father." Thus Saul of Tarsus, smitten low on the road to Damascus, saw Him and heard Him say: "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" And at the Last Day, coming in the clouds of heaven in great power and glory to be our Judge, every eye shall behold Him in His bodily form, as the Man Christ Jesus; for thus plainly, as plainly as words can express it, did the angels say: "This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven." And as He, so we. But for our Lord's ascension with our glorified nature we might have doubted in ourselves whether these poor sinful bodies which we here carry about would ever have been exalted to such a place of glory; but now our Lord's ascension assures us that human nature can be thus brought near to God, and inspires the hope that those

who believe in Christ here and live unto Him shall with glorified bodies be received into His presence hereafter, then to reign with Him world without end.

As Joseph of old was led by the gracious ordering of Providence into Egypt that he might prepare a home for his brothers, the ancestors of the chosen people of God, so our divine Joseph went on in advance to that far country to prepare a home for His brethren. That is His own statement: "I go to prepare a place for you." Our adorable Lord, as He passed through, left the golden gates ajar, as if to say: "I am only the Forerunner; more are coming." Correctly is the statement expressed in the language of the Christian poet: —

> Since Christ has gone to heaven, His home,
> I, too, that home one day must share,
> And in this hope I overcome
> All doubt, all anguish, and despair;
> For where the Head is, well we know
> The members He has left below
> In time He surely gathers.

Blessed, comforting prospect! In our blessed Lord's ascension we by faith behold our own.

And then there were mediatorial results in connection with the ascension of the Savior. He is not unmindful of us there. He continues His interest in our redemption. We sing in one of our Ascension hymns: —

> He stands in heaven, their great High Priest,
> And bears their names upon His breast.

Reference there is made to the Jewish high priest, who, with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel engraved on precious stones and fastened in a plate, would carry them on his breast and on the great Day of Atonement, entering into the Holy of Holies, would sprinkle blood upon the mercy-seat and intercede for the people, and thus, says the holy writer, "is Christ entered into heaven to appear in the presence of God for us." "If any man sin, we have an Advocate," a Mediator, a Spokesman, "with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous." What He once said to Peter: "Simon, Satan hath desired to have thee that he may sift thee as wheat; but I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not," that is the result of our Lord's ascension. He pleads yonder for the tempted Peters, the faltering, despairing souls, that their faith fail not. Truly, an uplifting, sustaining thought.

To these mediatorial blessings must be added what we considered a few Sundays ago, the Lord's declaration: "It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you." The outpouring of the Holy Ghost on Pentecost, His more enlarged effusion and operation, His administration of the kingdom of God, is due to the Savior's ascension. Withdrawing His bodily presence, He gave us the inward ministration of the third person of the adorable Trinity to enlighten, guide, comfort, sanctify, and serve us. A blessed thing for us that He ascended, leaving us such a successor and Gift!

This, then, is the event which engages our thoughts to-day with its attending circumstances and its significance. Nor can it be without practical worth and effect. The confession of our Fathers strikes the chord when it says: "Grant, O God, that like as we believe Thy only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to have ascended into the heavens, so we also in heart and mind may thither ascend." Let us in this respect, as in everything else, take Christ as our example. We have all read the poet Longfellow's exquisite ballad which tells how its hero, as evening was falling, passed through an Alpine village with a banner in his hand bearing the motto "Excelsior," *i. e.*, higher, ever higher; how every effort was made to check his progress; how the old man warned him of the falling avalanche; how the maiden besought him to tarry and rest, but how he continued with clarion voice to repeat his motto until he had gained the loftiest height. Let us in thought turn this parable into fact. Let us lay aside, as the apostle says, "every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

May God bless His Word, and to His name be all glory and praise! Amen.

Sunday after Ascension.

But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

Acts 1, 8.

These words, among the last which our Lord spoke prior to His ascension into heaven, tell us of the office, or commission, of the apostles, their qualification for this office, and the sphere in which they were to discharge it. That office, or commission, assigned them was to bear witness to Christ; the qualifications were the gift of the Holy Ghost; their sphere, the whole earth, yet in such order that they were to begin at Jerusalem, then to pass on to the province in which Jerusalem was situated, then to the district adjoining, Samaria, and so on, widening and widening their circuit, like rings upon the water, till they would encompass the entire globe. If these words concerned only the apostles, even then they would be worthy of our serious attention, being the words of our Lord, and among His last; but they equally concern all Christians of all times, generally and individually, and therefore should engage their devout attention. To begin, however, with those apostles to whom they were originally addressed, the Savior said: "Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto Me." And in this Sunday's Gospel-lesson, words spoken by Jesus prior to His death, He charges them: "When the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, He shall testify of Me. And ye also shall bear witness because ye have been with Me from the beginning."

This, then, was the apostolic office: the apostles were appointed to be witnesses to Christ; witnesses of the mighty deeds they had seen Him do; witnesses of the gracious words they had heard Him speak; witnesses of the holy life which they had seen Him lead and of the wonderful power He had exercised in them and in others. So they understood, and so they did. Calling upon men everywhere to repent and believe the Gospel of Christ, in proof of the truth of what they witnessed and in attestation of the sincerity with which they themselves were persuaded of it, they cheerfully bore all manner of persecutions, bonds, imprisonments, and even death.

It is well for us Christians of this present day to consider at times what the introduction into this world of the religion of

Jesus Christ, the Carpenter, the Rabbi of Nazareth, and the Crucified, meant for those twelve modest, unpretentious, and, for the most part, illiterate men, who had come from their fisher-boats in insignificant Galilee and were sent forth to gain the world for the preaching of the ascended Master. There was Rome, proud mistress of the world, steeped in the deepest and most profligate depths of a world-wide heathenism. Everywhere, in greatest profusion and elegance, stood the temples of a hundred and one gods and goddesses. There was Judaism with its ancient ritual, its bitter antagonism and prejudice against the new religion, whose Founder it had slain. All the forces of the prevailing government, powers, high and low, sentiment and passion, man's ignorance and man's wisdom, were arrayed against and pledged to resist, the rising faith; and in the face of this consider what the command of the Lord meant: "Ye shall be witnesses unto Me." The Gospel record tells us what it meant. It meant war with the entire order of existing things. It meant to be assailed by mobs, interfered with by authorities, condemned by courts, scourged by magistrates, stifled in dungeons, yes, to be turned over to executioners, to be slain on blocks or nailed to the cross, to be burned to ashes or to be cast before wild beasts. And this, be it marked, for the faith which we are permitted to enjoy unmolested, in absolute freedom, amid every surrounding of convenience and attractiveness.

And the qualifications of the apostles for their sublime office? "Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you." Their witness, had they been left to themselves, would have availed little; it would never have accomplished such a revolution in the belief of the world as it did. It was the Holy Ghost working in them and by them, giving them boldness to speak and wisdom how to speak, and confirming their words by signs following, who made their testimony effectual and in a very short space caused Christianity to triumph in all directions over the idolatry of the heathen and over the superstition and formalism of the Jews. How different a set of men do they appear after that Pentecostal outpouring of the Holy Ghost than before! Then they were lion-hearted, consecrated, resolved to spend and be spent for Christ and His cause.

And yet have we the sphere which was assigned to them, the province in which they were to bear testimony to Christ. "Ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and in Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth." Observe that

they were to begin at Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the city whose people had rejected Christ, persecuted Him even unto death; its soil was even then red with His blood. God's sentence of destruction had gone forth against its many and complicated iniquities. Yet Jerusalem is to be the first place where the apostles are to deliver their testimony and to publish the offers of salvation. How this sets forth to us the wonderful, amazing goodness, forbearance, mercy of our gracious Savior, His readiness to pardon, His unwillingness that any should perish! In spite of all her crimes the apostles were to begin their work at Jerusalem. As the old proverb most truly says: "Charity begins at home." However, it is further very plainly taught in the passage before us that the proclamation of the Gospel was not to restrict itself and to end there. "And in all Judea and in Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth," the Lord added. Not as if Jerusalem and Judea would not have furnished employment enough for the apostles for their lifetime. And it would have been very much in line with the contention of many in our day: Why go to distant parts when there is still so much to be done in our own community, in our immediate environments, and on our own shores? Such was not the course the Lord bade His apostles pursue. They were not to remain in Jerusalem until all Jerusalem would have embraced the faith, nor in Judea until all Judea would be converted. They were to bear their witness to Christ first in Jerusalem and, having borne it there, to pass on to the countries next adjoining, and so to the rest of the world. The apostolic activity was in accordance with the command of their Master. Radiating from Jerusalem, as from the center, they went forth in all directions of the compass. The Acts of the Apostles, especially the accounts of the journeyings of the great Apostle of the Gentiles, St. Paul, tell us of this, insomuch that before the death of St. John, the last survivor of the apostles, there was hardly a country in the world then known to which the tidings of salvation through a Savior's blood had not been borne. — So much, then, for our Lord's direction as it concerned the men to whom it was first addressed.

But Christ's command to be witnesses unto Him did not and does not concern only the apostles. It was a commission which was given to His entire Church; and lest we lose ourselves in generalities or would screen ourselves behind them, we should remember that it therefore pertains to us all individually, particularly. It is true, we cannot literally and strictly say as did

St. John: "That which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and our hands have handled, . . . we declare unto you." None of us in His own person has seen the power or heard the voice or witnessed the miracles of Christ. But this we can say, we have received accounts of Him and of His teachings and of His mighty works from a source and authority which it is impossible for us to doubt. And if we are true Christian people, sincerely so and not merely empty, professing ones, we can also say that we believe Him to be the Savior whom God has provided for fallen man; the Great Teacher come from God, in whom our salvation, happiness, hope, is centered, and bound up with, for time and eternity. And with that honest heartfelt conviction the charge reaches us: "Ye shall be witnesses unto Me." A foolish distinction is sometimes made. People think and say: That is the minister's business, his office. They do not understand their work and calling. The truth is that every Christian is something of a minister. Because he who has been called by the congregation is seen in the pulpit with prepared messages from the Scriptures, he is not to be regarded as doing anything else than simply performing in his place and according to the measure of his gifts what is the duty of every Christian to perform in his manner and place. The sphere of the one may be wider than the other, but the obligation is the same, and he who has not yet come to realize that he has this obligation to discharge has not yet drunk in the spirit and nature of the religion he professes and knows not his work and duty as a Christian. We have been hearing a great deal of discussion in late years as to why the masses are lapsing from the Church, why so many never attend the houses of worship, and the clergy has come in for a vast amount of pertinent and some very impertinent criticism. But methinks not a little of the fault is to be laid at the door of the laity. Christians, on the whole, have largely forgotten the message of the text and their God-enjoined duty to conform to it. The pew as well as the pulpit — and in many instances the pew more effectively than the pulpit — can bear testimony for its Lord. And it would be well for it to rouse itself up to the realization of this. Ne'er a man, woman, or child in that divine organization called the Church but has the duty, command, commission of its heavenly Founder: "Ye shall — thou shalt — be witnesses unto Me."

As to the qualifications, the apostles were qualified to bear

witness to Christ by the gift of the Holy Spirit poured forth upon them. So must we be. It is only by the Holy Spirit's aid that we can wield any effectual testimony to the Savior. Of ourselves we are entirely too timid, too worldly-minded, and too indifferent. There are those who think they can be Christians in secret. It will never do. "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven." A hidden, concealed, locked-up Christianity is a most unsatisfactory type of religion. "Whosoever shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before My Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father which is in heaven." Nor is there any neutral ground, no either — or. Then, how worldly-minded and worldly-acting are many professing followers of Christ! This is an exceedingly practical matter, but it is just in matters of practise that we can see whether we are witnesses unto Christ. Nor was there ever a time when it was more imperative to bear witness unto Christ than now. Who are Christians? Says the apostle: Those who are not conformed to this world. And who and how many are they? The persons least worldly, least concerned and interested in its frivolities, amusements, and vanities, are those who are most directly possessed and governed by the Holy Ghost, and it is as that Power enters into our hearts that we are qualified to be witness-bearers. Shall we not, then, supplicate Him to come into the hearts of every one of us, to make us less worldly-minded and more heavenly-minded and heavenly-acting, and thus fulfil more truly our God-appointed purpose as "witnesses unto Him"?

So much as to the qualifications; there remains yet the sphere.

The apostles were bidden to begin their teaching at Jerusalem, at home, and thence to go abroad. So now. Our first duty is to those most nearly connected with us; our families, our relatives, those whom we call friends, acquaintances, whom we can reach directly, and who, if we are sincere and in earnest, we shall be anxious to reach. Now, does your family know that you are a Christian? Do your schoolmates know it? your shopmates? your other associates? How do they know it? By your speech? There is a vast amount of backwardness in this respect. Parents will converse with the children on every possible topic, but rarely, if ever, on the one thing needful; that is left to the minister and the Sunday-school teacher. Acquaintances go in and out, dwell in our homes, but never a word is spoken of what makes up our

dearest in this life and our hope for the life to come. And yet, a word spoken by which you give your associates to understand whose you are and whom you serve, — how it may sink in and bear the most precious fruit for time and eternity! Why, then, this backwardness? Why do you never testify for Christ in your speech? Be not ashamed to tell people: I am a Christian.

And, again, there is your example. That speaks louder than words. People are willing to admit the force and reality of religion when they see that truth shown forth in personal life and conduct. A man is a member of a church, but for some reason, known best to himself and his God, he is negligent in the use of God's Word and His Sacraments. What is the practical consequence of such inconsistency? Aside from the violation of Christian duty, is that bearing witness for Christ? Remember, "no man liveth unto himself." Each one exerts some influence, and there is no influence like that of a Christian life. Not as if we shall escape without adverse experiences. Those words of the Savior: "A man's foes shall be they of his own household," are not superfluous in our days. Sneers, derision, words of reproach, charges of hypocrisy, and the like will be hurled against us. The days of moral martyrdom are not passed. How often does genuine religion produce loss of friendships, estrangement, cold civility! What of it? If endured for His sake, it shall have its reward.

But this pertains not only to those immediately around us. To be witnesses to Christ is to possess a missionary spirit, to long to see the Redeemer's kingdom established throughout the world, and to do what we can by means and contributions toward its extension. If we have no such spirit, we may well doubt whether we are ourselves in a state of salvation and safety.

May God's Spirit help us all to regard this solemn charge of to-day's text! Let us seek earnestly to be faithful witnesses for Him, for the strengthening of our own souls, for the salvation of the souls of others, and to the praise of our great Redeemer's name. Amen.

Pentecost.

Quench not the Spirit. — *1 Thess. 5, 19.*

"I believe in the Holy Ghost," that was our confession a few moments ago when in unison we recited the Creed; nor is there a season when we repeat those words with more special emphasis than on this morning — Pentecost, Whitsunday, the festival of the

Spirit. Like the other two chief festivals of our Christian church-year, Christmas and Easter, so Pentecost commemorates an important event in our Christian religion and teaches an important doctrine. The event is the descent of the Holy Spirit of God upon the first disciples at Jerusalem, the fulfilment to them, ten days after Christ's ascension, of His promise that they should receive power for their life's work by the coming of the Holy Ghost upon them. And so it was, as we heard from the Scripture-reading. Miraculously were they endowed with gifts of mind and of speech and with the power to perform supernatural things, such as healing the sick, raising the dead, etc.

But, as stated, this festival not only commemorates a historical fact, a notable event of the past, but out of that event springs a doctrine. That doctrine is this: "I believe in the Holy Ghost," namely, I believe that there is such a Person, and that He still dwells in all Christian hearts and works within them, which work is thus explained in the Third Article of our Catechism: "He has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith," so that this day was significant not only for those original disciples who gathered together with one accord in Jerusalem fifty days after Easter, but for us all; for it calls to our remembrance the gracious and powerful operation which the Holy Spirit carries on in the heart of every disciple of Christ in all ages and climes.

It is instructive to notice that the work of the Spirit of God is spoken of in the Bible under the figure of the three active elements in nature, namely, wind, water, and fire. In our Lord's conversation with Nicodemus He said: "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth. So is every one that is born of the Spirit." In His conversation with the Samaritan woman He compared it to water. The story of Pentecost speaks of tongues of fire, and also in our text reference is made to that element. Very properly so, for what is the action of fire? Fire destroys, consumes, burns up. No less the Spirit; entering the human heart, He destroys, consumes, burns up the inward dross of our sins and corruptions. Fire refines. So the Spirit refines, purifies, sanctifies. Fire produces light and warmth. The Spirit enlightens our minds and warms our hearts. Fire penetrates. So does the Spirit penetrate men's hearts with His divine influences.

And now the admonition of the text is that we must not

"quench," extinguish, put out in ourselves, that celestial fire. Much discussion has been carried on over the question whether, when once operative in the human heart, the Spirit of God can ever be entirely quenched in that heart. Now, aside from the fact that the Apostle Paul was not a man to spend time and energy in warning men against that which cannot be, it may be added that the Bible abounds in examples of those who did quench the Spirit. From the Old Testament we might mention Israel's first king, Saul; though possessed of the Spirit, he shamefully quenched it. And in the New Testament we have the example of Ananias and Sapphira, who fell dead at the apostle's feet. Neither does the word "quench," as some contend, admit of any qualified interpretation; it does not merely mean to resist, damp, or partially smother; it means absolutely what it says: to quench, totally to extinguish, put out. And that, according to the apostle's warning, is a danger to which, alas! all of us are liable. And how? In what way? Let that for once engage our Pentecostal study; and may He, the Spirit Himself, grant us due attention and deeply impress all of us with the solemnity of the text!

1.

Fire may be quenched in many different ways. The most obvious and direct way of extinguishing it is by pouring water upon it. What could that mean with reference to the work of the Spirit? What could it mean but the commission of sin. Every unholy action, every unholy word, every unkind thought encouraged, is like water poured upon this celestial fire, the Holy Ghost. Christians, even after they have been enlightened and made partakers of the Holy Spirit, have still within a very deceitful heart and are yet much exposed to the influence of evil and temptation, and unless they watch, they are liable to fall into the most grievous of sins. "A man after God's own heart" was he styled, that pious king of Israel, David, the sweet singer and composer of psalms, and yet he sank down into the filth of the most shocking crimes, so that, if he had died in that state of unforgiven sinfulness, he would have been lost forever. Never imagine yourself beyond the reach of temptation. We carry within us passions and appetites that render us susceptible to constant dangers. In his letter to the Ephesians the apostle plainly specifies a number of such that "quench the Spirit," saying: "Putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor. Let not the sun go

down upon your wrath. Let him that stole steal no more." When a Christian abandons his tongue to deceitfulness and his lips to utter falsehood, he quenches the Spirit; for the Spirit is a Spirit of truth, the uncompromising enemy of falsehood. When a fiery, explosive, uncontrollable temper is indulged, a vindictive, malignant disposition, which holds anger and gloats over a fellow-man's misfortune, such conduct is of the wicked spirit, the devil, and quenches the Spirit of God. When dishonesty, sharp practises, smart dealings, which will not let the sun shine through them, mar a professing Christian's conduct, — a dollar easily made is valued more than a good conscience, — such dealings quench the Spirit of God; they are like water plunged upon the inner flame of godliness. A Christian must be honest, upright.

2.

But it does not even take water to quench that flame. Another way, not quite so immediately effective, but effective for all that, is to spread earth upon it. And how applicable that is to the ministry of the Spirit! The apostle speaks elsewhere of "minding earthly things." Our Lord, in the familiar parable of the Seed and the Sower, mentions "the cares of this life," its pleasures, saying that they choked the seed, so that it became unfruitful. The cares of this life may be said to quench the inner fire of the Spirit. Gay company, brilliant and bewildering spectacles, pursuits, labors, useful in themselves and excellent in their due places, intemperately indulged in, may become deadly foes. The difference between these and the outright commission of sins lies in the subtlety, the insidiousness.

To speak by way of comparison. A man begins to feel that he is no longer what he once was physically; he has lost much of his former buoyancy and cheerfulness. It is not that he has become old. It is not that he is wilfully declining his food. It is not that he is exhausting himself with labors or wasting his energy by an immoral life. For a time his debilitation may be a mystery, but at length he discovers in the neighborhood of his house a stagnant pool or some decaying matter which is impregnating the air with its poisonous exhalations. Not that he is conscious of any offensive scent, but there is a quietly harmful influence, which is inhaled at every breath, and which taints every drop of blood it reaches, and ere he is aware of it, a sufficient quantity of

poison is in the system to unstring every nerve, to break down every tissue, and to mark him for the grave.

Now, there is around us, just as subtle and as destructive, an influence, an element, which operates as a moral and spiritual enervator. Its mischief arises in great measure from the fact that you cannot point out its clear antagonism to any one of the Ten Commandments. If you could do this, then you could rouse your conscience against it. Yet, while it is not sin itself, there is an influence and a temptation towards sin, an atmosphere which is impregnated with poisonous, injurious exhalations. The spiritual life is marked by great sensitiveness. The slightest influences tell upon it, though for a season the man himself may not be conscious of the fact that he is undergoing deterioration; somehow the general tone of his spiritual life has been lowered, and he is not the person he once was. Noiselessly, yet fatally, a worm has been gnawing at the root of the tree, till, sickly and fading, a sudden gust of wind may snap it like a reed and hurl it to the ground. Dear hearers, does this not describe the spiritual life of many a one? That worm we call "worldliness"; the Lord called it the cares and the pleasures of this life and the deceitfulness of riches. We speak of it as earth that is thrown upon the inner fire kindled in the Christian heart by the Spirit of God; and thus that heavenly fire is quenched.

3.

Again, continuing our reflection, fire may be quenched by withholding from it the supply of fuel, by simply leaving it alone. One need only cease to add oil to the burning lamp or coal to the heating furnace, and darkness and cold will inevitably follow. God's Spirit likewise has ordained fuel by the use of which His presence and power remain within our hearts. His Word and His holy Sacraments, as dispensed in this Volume and in this house of God, are this fuel. The Spirit does not work without means. We have an example of that in this Bible; it was written by men who wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. It is the product of His inspiration, and hence it is not man's, but God's own Book, resting upon His authority and testimony. And it is through it that the Spirit of God works conviction, faith, and eternal life. Now, for any one to neglect it, to despise the preaching of it and the study of it, not to join oneself to those who gather together in His name to hear its divine contents, to neglect the use of the holy Sacraments, although we know, or should know, that

they are outward visible signs of an inward spiritual grace given unto us therein, ordained by Christ Himself, — what is this but to do what the apostle warns against? Let us not seek to be wiser than God, let us not think our thoughts and follow our own vain imaginations, but do as He directs us; for He knows us much better than we do ourselves. Not without supreme wisdom did He insert that Third Commandment among the ten, which means: "We should fear and love God that we may not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it." Nor can any one remain away from that blessed meal for months and years concerning which Christianity's Founder has plainly directed: "This do," and that often, "in remembrance of Me," without exposing his soul to the danger of losing his faith, the gracious indwelling and working of the Spirit of God.

The same holds true with respect to another particular in Christian life. Part of the gracious work of the Spirit, as defined in the Bible, is to help us to pray. It is true that, where there is no prayer, there is no spiritual life, and yet, for the most part we must confess that praying is with us often a languid affair. We know not the things for which we ought to pray, and we do not pray with that devotion and fervor with which we ought and would love to pray. Hence St. Paul says regarding prayer that the Spirit stands ready to help us in our infirmities. If a fire is burning low and you would revive it, you must supply it with more air. In religious life it is not different. If you would have the flame of your piety burn bright, you must cultivate earnestly the habit of prayer, you must invoke the aid of that powerful and gracious Spirit to help you in your infirmities. If, when we lift up our thoughts and hearts to God, we would ask God's Spirit to help us pray, how much more fervent would be our devotions, how much more refreshing, and how much more effectual! Let us take this thought with us from our Pentecostal meditation and ask God to make us more and more men and women of prayer, and through the aid of His Holy Spirit to grant us grace to let our approaches to God become more frequent and more devout. If there is no such seeking after God, what will all our outward conformity to the Christian religion amount to? Little, if any, will be the blessings received. More supply of our spiritual life by prayer, by the help of the Holy Ghost, else extinction of that inner life will follow.

And to conclude, one other particular. On that first day of

Pentecost the Spirit, descending in wonderful energy, endowed the apostles with supernatural, extraordinary gifts. The Church to-day no longer, because it is no longer necessary, possesses those extraordinary gifts. But the Spirit still bestows gifts and graces upon His Church. There are the so-called natural gifts which are possessed by its members; from whom are they? And there are the spiritual gifts, such as faith, prayer, courage to stand up for the truth; every man, Scripture informs us, has received his gift. And for what purpose? For the same purpose for which the apostles received them; to us the apostle's expression, "to minister the same," to use them in God's employ, for the maintenance, furtherance, and extension of His kingdom. When the Spirit of God calls a person into the Church, He lays His hand upon him, as it were, and says: Your gifts are Mine.. The gifts with which the Holy Spirit endows us may be of the head, tongue, voice, or hand, they may be education or skill, means or influence, — they are to be used by us to the best interests of Christ's cause. There is something for every one to do in the Church. Alas! that so many have never honestly put the question to themselves: What is there for me to do? And so the churches are full of those whose talents lie dormant; they are like drones in the hive of congregational life. Not as if God had endowed us all alike, but He has endowed us all. And if it was necessary for St. Paul to exhort Timothy: "Stir up the gift that is in thee," this word may apply to us all.

Let us, on this festival on which we are commemorating the outpouring of the Holy Ghost, resolve that the gifts He has bestowed upon us shall be consecrated to His cause, to His service. Not everything else first, then His Church. No, God first, His affairs, then other affairs. Be *this* our day of Pentecost — the coming of the Holy Ghost! May we never, by sinfulness, worldliness, prayerlessness, and neglect of Word and Sacrament, nor by withholding our gifts for God's Church, quench the Spirit within us! No greater calamity or crime could we bring upon our souls. Let our supplication be: —

> **Come, O come, Thou quickening Spirit,**
> **True God from eternity,**
> **Let us Thy blest grace inherit**
> **And our souls be filled with Thee.**

Herein is life, light, peace, consolation, salvation, and heaven. Amen.

Trinity Sunday.

Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars Hill and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, "To the Unknown God." Whom, therefore, ye ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you." — *Acts 17, 22. 23.*

It was in the city of Athens, the famous capital of the land of Greece, that these words were first spoken. The man who spoke them was the great Apostle Paul, who in the course of his missionary travels had come to this place. But before he began his activities, he made a survey of the place, of what was to be seen and learned. And perhaps no other spot on the face of the earth has ever had so many objects of interest collected within it as that ancient metropolis of Greece. Wherever the apostle looked, there flashed upon him the splendors of learning and art. Being the center of human culture and genius, Athens contained in sublime magnificence and profusion the finest productions of the painter's brush and the sculptor's chisel, paintings that were masterpieces, statues unrivaled, buildings dazzling for architectural effect.

Nor was the apostle a man so destitute of taste and sense of beauty that he should have failed to observe this grand display of skill and perfection. He had received a most scholarly training and was a genius himself. And yet, like Luther in Rome, there was nothing in all this pomp and classic glory to kindle his admiration; for as he passed from street to street, there was one thing that depressed him with every increasing step, and that was the prevalence of idolatry as it appeared on the right hand and on the left. Temple joined itself to temple, altar unto altar, images of heathenish gods and goddesses, hewn out in exquisite workmanship, thronged every place, — 30,000 is the number given, — and for fear that they might have overlooked one, the Athenians even set up an altar upon which they inscribed the words, "To the Unknown God."

No wonder that Paul, accustomed to look at things with a spiritual eye, to weigh things in the balance of immortal truth, was stirred within him and, true to his nature and divine commission, could not hold his peace. Engaged in conversation first with this one and that one, he gradually found himself surrounded with a crowd listening and asking questions, and finally, in order to be able more fully to hear his teaching, they took him aside from the moving multitude — a genuine Athenian practise — up to the

top of the rocky elevation called Mars Hill, so called from a temple dedicated to the war god Mars, built upon it. The apostle, it need scarcely be mentioned, was equal to the occasion. If ever Athens heard a masterful oration, that audience on Mars Hill heard it that day from Paul's lips. It is regarded by all, even by such as are not in sympathy with its thoughts, one of the choicest gems of human speech. The subject of it was, as he himself says in our text: "I declare unto you the unknown God."

Nor could any subject be more profitable for us on this particular Sunday than to review what he says. Summing up its lessons, we shall consider God as He has revealed Himself to man: —

1. In nature, 2. In providence, 3. In the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

May God's blessing attend our meditation!

1.

The apostle, beginning his address, affirms that "God made the world and all things therein." That to us is a most simple and elementary truth. If a Christian child were asked, "Who made you?" it would answer, "God." To those Athenians it was something perfectly novel. The Greek mind in its wisest philosophy had often grappled with the mysterious problem as to the origin of the world, where it came from. But notwithstanding all the time and energy expended upon solving it, it continued to be shrouded to them in deepest darkness and mystery. History seems to testify that the human mind, left to its own resources, could never grasp the idea of creation, properly so called. One of the schools of philosophers held that the universe is the result of what they termed a fortuitous combination of atoms. Another held that the earth, such as we behold it to-day, had always existed and, accordingly, was eternal, that it never had a beginning. Still others maintained something else. But all the sages of antiquity, with all their intensive and protracted studies, could not give the satisfactory answer now readily furnished by every child. That God in the beginning created the world out of nothing, that what we see above, beneath, and around us is the result of an act of creation on the part of an almighty Creator out of nothing by the power of His almightiness, that had never entered their minds.

And as with the origin of matter, so with that of man. "And hath made of one blood," the apostle told those Athenians, "all nations of men." Again a simple and elementary truth to us, yet

strikingly new to those hearers. The origin of man had baffled the most ingenious efforts of the ancient thinkers. The popular opinion among the Greeks was that man had sprung from the soil of their own land. Nor has man's wisdom made much progress on this point. According to the advanced and fashionable notion of the twentieth century, man is still evolved out of nature.

To enter a little more into this subject. You are all aware that in recent years the doctrine called the doctrine of Evolution has been revived by men of the highest scientific culture. I say revived, because the doctrine of Evolution is as old as the times of Seucippus and Democritus, two Greek philosophers who flourished four to five hundred years before Christ, being revived in the writings of the Roman poet Lucretius, who flourished about fifty-five years before the birth of Christ. Therefore it is not new, but merely dressed up in a different garment. According to these ancients the material universe, the world, was not created by the Supreme Being, but was formed by the union of elemental particles, or atoms, which had existed from all eternity, governed by certain simple laws. That, too, is the view of such men as Darwin, Huxley, and other modern scientists, namely, that life came from things which did not have life before, interacting upon one another; in other words, that life is self-originated, that blind atoms came together in such relations that they evolved — hence the word Evolution — life as the consequence. According to this doctrine there is no need of a divine power to start this life of the world or to continue it; in matter itself these scientists see, to use their own language, "the potency, the power, of all terrestrial life." This is the first article of the doctrine of Evolution, to dispense with the Creator of the world.

The second is that all the forms of animal and vegetable life were successively and gradually developed from the simplest organisms. They called these the primeval protoplasms. From these protoplasms, or primordial cells, came man, not at once, but through successive stages, the original protoplasmic cell passing into a plant, the plant into a worm, the worm into a fish, the fish into a reptile, the reptile into a bird, the bird into a mammal, the mammal into an ape, and the ape into a man.

Consequently, man is only a higher animal, the lineal descendant of a family of apes, but one who has somehow come into such a high state of development (the scientists do not tell us how) that he possesses a reasoning and moral nature, which separates

him from his remote ancestors. That, in its simplest form and broadest outline, is the much-controverted doctrine of Evolution. What should we, guided by God's Word, believe concerning it? If this doctrine is true, then there is no Creator of the world, because according to this theory the world created itself, brought forth all the wonderful forms of existence we see around us, and is indebted to no power or intelligence beyond itself.

And a second conclusion, equally as unavoidable, is, that man, being wholly material and of this earth, has no spirit apart from the body and no immortality. Of the dust he is, and to the dust does he return, and that is the end of him.

Without entering upon its various astounding propositions, what will you think when I inform you that almost all the most eminent of scientific men who hold this doctrine confess that they can offer you no proof of it, that is, that it is a guess of the intellect and nothing more? There exists not the least evidence to prove that any form of life can be derived out of matter; and the missing link between man and the ape has never yet been discovered. Purely a hypothesis, theory, never satisfactorily demonstrated. Was not St. Paul right when he wrote: "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools"?

Over against such theories the apostle affirms in grand simplicity that "God made the world and all things therein." We are not products of chance, of nature, or of evolution, but the truth is, as our Catechism expreses it, "that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still preserves them." Any other interpretation dishonors God and debases man. In all sincerity and in simplicity of faith let us hold to the account of creation as given us in the first chapter of our Bible, as it is the one and only satisfactory key to the mystery of man's origin.

2.

Having created the world, God is still present in it as its Lord, Governor, and Director. As the apostle says: "Seeing He giveth to all life and breath and all things, and hath determined the times before appointed and the bounds of their habitation."

This, too, was news to the apostle's hearers. While the Athenians did not deny the existence of deities, as the numberless idols and temples testified, they denied the government of the gods. They held that all was under the relentless rule of Fate and

necessity — whatever happens, happens because it so happens. And in our day we still have plenty of men who hold the same notion. There are still plenty of people who, even though they admit that God has created the universe, yet claim that He does not now govern it personally. They maintain that He has left it to govern or develop itself. To use their own modern phraseology, they say: "God has placed the government of the world under established natural laws."

My beloved, let us not be imposed upon nor awed in this matter or any other by modern phraseology. We ask, What is this thing which they so learnedly call "natural law"? Law is simply an expression of the will of a lawgiver. Laws have not originated or established themselves. Laws do not sustain or execute themselves. They are merely the principles on or by which a personal agent operates, the methods in which that personal agent, as we call Him, ordinarily and generally exerts His power. Thus an apple always falls downward, — that is according to the law of gravitation, — but it is not the law of gravitation that makes the apple fall; it is something back of that law and mightier than it which causes it to do so. God is the acting force, and the law is simply the expression of the mode or manner in which God acts. Behind nature is God. The swallows emigrate every year to the proper clime at the proper time. Who keeps the time and marks the points? The swallows? No, God. The bee builds its comb according to the strictest principles of geometry. Who is the mathematician? The bee? No, God. Men may imagine in their blindness that an inexorable Law performs all the work, that relentless Fate governs all; but both learned reason and God's Revelation agree that it is a personal agent that governs and controls all events in nature, and all the actions and circumstances of man. It is He who rolls the mighty planets and guides the tiny bird in its flight. He is not going to allow Himself to be separated from the works of His hands and from the creatures made in His image. As the apostle declares: "He is not far from every one of us, for in Him we live and move and have our being." Not as heathenism does the religion of our Bible represent to us the Divine Being, dwelling in some far-off, distant region, indifferent and unconcerned about the creatures it has launched into existence. No, it represents God as a loving Father, without whose will and permission nothing happens that does happen, and what does happen, happens for our ultimate welfare. That is the doctrine

of divine providence as expressed in the Catechism: "I believe that God . . . still preserves them [my body and soul, etc.]; that He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life; that He defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil."

3.

Having shown that God is the Creator, Ruler, and Father of man, the apostle presents Him to his wondering audience in another light, namely, as the Redeemer of man in the Gospel. And here the apostle, as Christ's messenger of God's revealed Word, was standing on most firm ground. He says — and his language is the most tactful and considerate tongue could utter —: "And the times of this ignorance God winked at." He meant to say: You Athenians have hitherto worshiped idols instead of the true and living Creator; you bowed your knees before statues and stones. You have failed to discover God as you might have done, failed to find His witness in creation and in His ordering of the universe. God has overlooked this ignorance; "but now," he adds, "He commandeth all men everywhere to repent." That "now" indicates that a new call and a new era had come in the history of the world. And then the apostle preached Jesus to his hearers, finishing with an exhortation "to repent because God hath appointed a day in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained, whereof He hath given assurance unto all men in that He hath raised Him from the dead."

Wherever Paul went, he preached the Crucified and Risen One. That was his great and glorious topic. He did not omit this on Mars Hill. And of all revelations this is the grandest one set forth to us. What that means embraces all that is written in our sacred Volume, of which Jesus is the chief substance and the perpetual theme; indeed, what Holy Writ says of Him and His work of redemption is, in a word, the Christian religion.

And in that preaching is the true revelation of God. Only in Jesus Christ can we know God. The world which He made tells us indeed of Him. Heaven and earth are full of His majesty and glory. "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handiwork," says the psalmist. Whether we look at the stars and the sky and the clouds above, or at the grass and the trees and the flowers beneath, or whether we think of ourselves, who are so wonderfully made, all things tell us of Him

in whose hand is everything, both what is visible and invisible. And yet, thus regarded, God is veiled in eternal mystery. We know that He is, but scarcely more. We know that He is good and wise, as well as great and strong, but darkness is in His steps. Go where we will, we can find Him. Yet, go where we will, in vain do we try to know Him unless we learn to know Him in Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ, very God of very God, of one substance with the Father, one with the Father, we behold what God is; "for I," He said, "and My Father are one." In the mind of Jesus Christ we read the mind of God. In the character of Jesus Christ we learn all that man can know of the character of God. In the deeds of Jesus Christ we behold the love and pity and tenderness and long-suffering of God. In the words of Jesus Christ we hear the truth as it is upheld by God. And in the Cross of Jesus Christ we have the salvation of God. And in His most awful and yet most consoling sacrifice we see the heart of God; we behold and realize what He did to reconcile unto Himself a fallen race, who by disobedience had strayed from Him. "This," as He Himself says, "is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent." Without the knowledge of the Gospel of Jesus Christ we cannot rightly know God.

For that reason Paul lifted up his voice on Mars Hill and said: "Him," whom you call on one of your altars "the unknown God," who hitherto has been unknown to you, "Him declare I unto you."

And to make a few practical observations, did the Athenians need this revelation of God in Christ Jesus? "Enlightened Greece," is what the world's scholars call it. "Benighted Greece," is what in reality it was. Read what is called Greek mythology, the story of its fabled gods and goddesses upon Mount Olympus, the residence of those gods and goddesses. Or observe, as St. Paul says, how they "changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man and to birds and four-footed beasts and creeping things," until their capital city was one immense quarry, as it were, of sculptured idols, and you have proof of the fact that all their human knowledge, their mind culture, and their accomplishments, without the knowledge of the true God, was but so much learned folly, "ignorance," as the apostle terms it. "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools."

Nor was this all. As there can be no true knowledge without

the true God, so there can be no true morals without Him. These two things always go together. If man's belief is wrong, his life is wrong. Could we tell you of the worship that was going on around those gilded temples and altars of Athens, it would be a description of abominations and impurities so utterly revolting that we wonder the very marble out of which the statues of their gods and goddesses were sculptured did not blush, and that God did not send another flood to wash out so shocking an iniquity.

The world is very different in many ways from what it was in the days of Paul. This city, for instance, with its saintly name, is St. Louis, not Athens, yet the differences are, after all, only surface differences, and the same principle obtains. Man is still the same, with the same sinful passions and lusts; he needs a knowledge of the true God as much now as then, and only where that right knowledge exists, can there be a correspondingly right life, pleasing to God.

That right knowledge of God we can have only when we believe that the Bible reveals the mind of God. That right life we shall live only when that right knowledge of Jesus Christ has penetrated our hearts and minds in hope, love, and Christian faith. May we know Him and adore Him whom Paul declared on Mars Hill to the Athenians, to them until then the unknown God, but unto us the Way, the Truth, and the Life, our Creator, Provider, Redeemer, blessed forevermore. Amen.

First Sunday after Trinity.

I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell; God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven; . . . how that he was caught up into paradise and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. — *2 Cor. 12, 2. 4.*

We have here in our Scripture-text a remarkable statement, an account of a most singular experience. We sometimes speak of that bourn, or country, from which no traveler returns. We lament that not one of those who have crossed the dark stream which separates this world from the world beyond has ever come back to report to us of that mysterious land. In this we do injustice to ourselves and ungratefully forget what God has done and arranged to enlighten and confirm our faith. There are those who have crossed the boundaries of this present life and come

back to tell of their visions and experiences. Not only our blessed Savior, who could not be holden of death, but a whole array of God's servants, Isaiah and Ezekiel and John, give a series of such disclosures, telling in their writings of what they saw and heard in yonder further world. In the gospel accounts of the days of our Savior's ministry we read of the raising from the dead of Lazarus and the daughter of Jairus and the widow's son at Nain. At the resurrection of Christ many bodies of "the saints which slept" arose and came out of their graves and went into the Holy City and appeared to many. And did not the Apostle Peter call back from the eternal world the spirit of Dorcas? And in our text we read of a vision of paradise.

It is the Apostle Paul who is here speaking, and he is speaking of himself. What he describes was a sort of trance, or rapture, the manner of which we shall not seek to unravel. The apostle himself tells us that he did not understand it, and it is not likely that by prying we shall become any wiser about it than he. He says: "Whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell; God knoweth." Nor is there any likelihood that he ever would have referred to it if his authority as an apostle had not been called into question; for fourteen years he had kept it a secret, and later on he tells us that it had resulted in his "thorn in the flesh," which God gave him lest he should be unduly exalted by his wonderful experience, so that there is absolutely no question as to the reality of it. And what was it? "I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago; . . . such an one caught up to the third heaven."

The Jews distinguished three heavens: first, the atmospheric regions around us, the heavens in which the birds fly, through which the clouds move, and out of which the rains fall; secondly, the region of the heavenly bodies, the space which contains the sun, moon, and stars; thirdly, that particular place which is the residence, the habitation, of God, where Christ has gone and whence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. Thither, to the third heaven, the apostle was "caught up," suddenly and unexpectedly snatched away, translated. There was a temporary flight of the spirit from the body; it reveled in the bliss of heaven, drank in the joys of the eternal world; it felt, saw, and enjoyed the grand realities of the dwelling-place of God. Concerning this there is no doubt. But what appears to us as the strange part of the account is this, that he says of the unspeakable words which he

heard: "which it is not lawful for a man to utter." He does not say that God especially, in this particular case, forbade him to utter the things he then heard, but that it was unlawful. He was restrained by a general law governing the case. Of all those who have been absent from the body and for any reason were recalled, not one ever uttered a word as to his experience in yonder world. Lazarus was in the grave four days; he was dead perhaps five. During this time he was absent from the body, in paradise. What a recital he might have given of what he saw and heard during his passage into, and his sojourn in, the spirit land. What a theme for a lecture in modern times! Imagine with what flaming headlines the public press would announce the subject: "Five Days in Paradise!" And the country would go wild to learn what such a one had to say. Yet not a word ever issued from the lips of Lazarus. The same is true of all others whom Christ or the apostles brought back from the spirit land. Not even our blessed Lord Himself, during His forty days' sojourn after Easter, ever intimated a thing concerning His sojourn in paradise while His body was three days in the grave.

Now why is this? Why did these persons not tell us of their personal experience? Let this be the first lesson we will gather from our meditation this morning, namely: It is the express will of God that we should derive our knowledge of the eternal world from the Bible. The Bible is God's revelation to man. He has tied us down to that. It is a safe guide, and it is a sufficient guide, and it is the only guide. All that we need to know, all that it seems best to our heavenly Father that we should know at the present, is here revealed. More we might not be able to understand, and to know more might gratify an idle curiosity at the expense of turning away our minds from those present duties of practical truths in which we have so deep and personal a concern. God intends that we shall never become independent of His Book. That is the source and the limit of His information to us. Had the dead the power and the privilege of communicating with the living, of what use would the Bible be? Of no more use than last year's almanac. Had Paul been permitted to utter his vision and revelation, the men of his time would have been looking for another, similar communication, and their attention would have been turned away from that counsel of Christ: "Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of Me." The tendency of men is ever to look for

other ways and means of religious impression than those which they at present enjoy. It was so in Christ's day. He was working before them the works of God, by His word making the blind to see, the deaf to hear, the lame to walk, and even the dead to live, and yet they were clamoring for a sign from heaven, some miraculous appearance in the sky, something more startling than was then going on. Our Lord refused it. In the parable of to-day's Gospel-lesson, of the rich man and poor Lazarus, He recognizes and rebukes this same infidel spirit. "I pray thee, therefore, father," the rich man in hell said to Abraham, "that thou wouldest send him to my father's house; — for I have five brethren, — that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment." But Abraham answered him: "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them." And when the rich man rejoined: "Nay, Father Abraham; but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent," Abraham replied: "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead." Men at this day are prone to quiet themselves in their unbelief by the fancy that some startling influence, some revelation from heaven direct, would arouse their sensibilities and work a change in their hearts and their convictions. It is not so. If ever there was a time when men's conscience ought to have been stirred and when they should have come to repentance, it was during the past years of the most cruel and destructive of wars, and when epidemic and death were stalking broadcast over the land. How was it in reality? Have our churches grown in number and membership and spirituality? And so let some one, as the rich man suggested, come to us from the farther realm and stand in the midst of a multitude; they would be startled, petrified, become as dead men, or hysterical; but after his departure they would be the same men as before. There is nothing in mere affright to soften and subdue the heart into penitence. Men are not *driven* or scared into the kingdom of heaven, but *drawn,* and that drawing is wrought by the Spirit of God through His Word. It is God's express will that men should be dependent upon the Bible for the faith that saves the soul and the knowledge that makes wise unto salvation. Hence He has put this veto on the revelation of anything experienced by Paul. It is upon the Bible that we are constantly thrown. That is the first lesson.

Again, there are some things clearly refuted by the brief statements of the passage. It refutes that form of infidelity known

as *materialism*. According to a favorite conception of to-day man is all matter when he dies; for instance, all there is of him dies. There is no life apart from the body. That is a low and dishonoring view of immortal man. How such teaching is refuted by what Paul tells us! He says that at the time when he had this experience, and even at the time when he wrote this letter, he did not know whether he was then in the body or out; so he may have been out, and out of the body he experienced such revelation. Hence, realizing such lifelike and wonderful things as St. Paul realized in the third heaven may be enjoyed by one out of the body. Therefore it follows that life does not depend on the body. It continues apart from the body. Hence, life after death is clearly established and materialism refuted by this experience. Alas! indeed, for the poor souls that hold to it and would have themselves believe that, when their bodies are deposited in the ground or cremated by the flames of a furnace, as that class of people prefer, they are like the brutes whose carcasses are cast upon the dunghill, or whose bones and hides are converted into articles of merchandise. They shall, if God's Word is true, as it is, like the man in to-day's Gospel-lesson, be horrified by the same terrible awakening: "And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments."

Another phase of infidelity which it completely overturns is *spiritualism*. This, in some respects, is the opposite of materialism. Spiritualism, or spiritism, claims to communicate with the spirits of the departed, to receive messages from the other world, and this is supposed to meet with divine approbation. In the lists of churches you will find announced meetings of Spiritualists. But St. Paul says it was unlawful for him to reveal the things he heard when he was caught up to the third heaven. It follows, therefore, that it is unlawful in any case for those who are absent from the body to reveal to the living what they experienced while thus absent. If, then, as the Spiritualists contend, there is such a communication going on with the living on the part of the dead, it is in violation of divine Law. The parties are lawbreakers and hence in rebellion against God. Being in rebellion against Him, they are under His condemnation. Then it is wickedness to be so engaged, the work of Satan and not the work of God. By Christian people, therefore, it should be abhorred. We know that the whole thing is a delusion and a snare of the

devil. But if there is anything in it, it is contrary to God's will, engaged in only by the wicked, and an abomination unto the Lord.

Once again, this account teaches us that there is such a place and state as heaven, that heaven is a world of reality, of literal and rational life. The apostle was in heaven; he was in the presence of heavenly beings, and they spoke to him. Who they were, men, angels, or Christ, we are not informed; perhaps all three. The destination to which we are going is not a myth and shadow, a visionary, unreal sphere, but it is as substantial and lifelike in all its features as the life and world we now enjoy, a residence of light and glory and blessedness to which it is our privilege to attain through Him who died for us and rose again.

It is not for us to be too curious about the things of that other world. It may seem desirable to have information regarding many subjects upon which the Bible maintains a profound silence, such as, where heaven is, its precise location; the number of its inhabitants and the nature of their employments and the mode of their intercourse; by what means the soul, when it leaves the body, reaches the place of its abode. These and many like questions curiosity puts, and puts in vain. Such familiarity would unfit us for our proper duties here. It is enough that some have seen and heard what heaven has in store for us and that they came back to assure us of the reality. What it behooves us is to live on in humble faith and hope, to trust in Jesus, and try to perform our duties well, till one of the days or nights this world of toil and of tears shall fade from our sight, and in its stead far other scenes shall open, while our enraptured spirits ask, What place is this? and exclaim, What wondrous, transcendent revelations! What excellent music! Behold the white-robed choirs! Ah, the beautiful words we are hearing! What a sublime King, benignant, and stretching forth His hand of welcome! To this a multitude of blessed voices will answer: O soul, this is paradise!

Jerusalem the golden,
With milk and honey blest!
Beneath thy contemplation
Sink heart and voice oppressed.
Jesus, in mercy bring us
Soon to that land of rest,
Who art with God the Father
And Spirit ever blest.

Amen.

Second Sunday after Trinity.

Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another, and so much the more as ye see the day approaching. — *Heb. 10, 25.*

One of the strangest traits in the character of man is his disposition to put off, to defer, to procrastinate. Thus, to cite an example from the Bible, it was with King Pharaoh of Egypt. While one of the dreadful plagues was upon the land, that of frogs, he sent for God's representatives, Moses and Aaron, and said, "Intreat the Lord for me that He would take away the frogs." And Moses said, "When shall I intreat for thee?" And he said, "To-morrow." One should think that Pharaoh would have said: "Moses, what a question is this! You see with your own eyes what an evil condition I am in. Would you or any one else be willing to remain in such straits another day or even another hour? The sooner, the better. This very moment intreat the Lord for me." But no; he said, "To-morrow." And in no respect does this inclination of man appear more pronounced than in matters of religion.

Paul, standing before the Roman Governor Felix, reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come. His words made a powerful impression upon Felix; his conscience smote mightily within him. Yet the result? He bids the apostle go his way, promising to send for him when he would have a more convenient season. But we do not read that he ever had. And the conduct of Felix is a true specimen, a faithful picture, of the larger portion of mankind, irrespective of age or condition. The young persuade themselves that they have "time enough" yet to become religious; those of advanced years are very much of the same opinion, and even when age and infirmities proclaim the decline of earth's pilgrimage, the same lying spirit that deceived at twenty is believed at threescore. "Why, that is a matter a person can take up at any time." And when on this occasion or that, serious illness or a funeral perchance, thoughts of seriousness do arise in their hearts, it is only momentary, it glances from their hearts as does a ray of light from a block of marble.

Now, such a course is most absurd. What would you think of a man who, wishing to cross a river, would lie down on its bank till the waters would all run by? Foolish you would call him; you would believe him to be bereft of reason. And yet he would be

not one whit more foolish than a man who is always purposing, but never performing; who, neither warned by the past nor alarmed as to the future, lies down on the banks of human existence and lets all the waters of time, the golden opportunities within his reach, run by. Most fatal too. It is a perilous thing to trifle with the invitations of God as He summons us by that still, small voice within our bosoms, by the dealings of His providence, be they of mercy or of affliction, and by the gracious overtures which sound in His precious Gospel within His Church. To spurn them is to invoke His wrath and displeasure, to run the risk of having them withdrawn altogether. And such words of earnest exhortation are not only in place with respect to those who altogether put away from themselves religious consideration, but also with respect to such as do not give religion the consideration it deserves, but treat it as a secondary matter, who are not governed by the Savior's directions: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness." And who does not occasionally require a word of reminding in this respect?

Let us then, invited by the Gospel-lesson and our text, view —

1. *Some of the excuses that are offered in the hindrance of religious duties.*
2. *Regard the real reason why some forsake the assembling of themselves together, and how we ought to overcome this.*

May God grant His blessing!

1.

The excuses offered in to-day's Gospel-lesson, in response to the invitation to the marriage-supper, were absolutely without validity or force; if it were not so serious a matter, we might regard them as exceedingly trivial and amusing. The one had bought a piece of land and must needs go and see it. As if ground were a perishable thing and would not lie in the same location and have the same quality of soil to-morrow as it had to-day! The other had bought five yoke of oxen and must go and test them. As if their strength would have failed them on the day after! And a third had married a wife, and for that reason he said he could not come. As if his wife would not have enjoyed the banquet also!

There are, we stand ready to admit, legitimate, good reasons for absence on the Lord's day from one's pew in the Lord's house. Ill health, real, not imaginary, — the kind that manifests itself on Sunday morning and departs in the afternoon, — domestic hap-

penings, extremely inclement weather, dangerous to those of delicate constitutions, or any other hindrances sent by God Himself. But for the most part the excuses offered are naught but hollow, poor, paltry pretexts, harming the soul and dishonoring God. Frankly to mention a few. One excuse why people do not go to church, at any rate, not more consistently, is the minister. Yes, the minister is very much to blame, both as to his personality and as to his sermons. There are persons of strong likes and dislikes, and they are not very modest in voicing them as to the office-bearers in Christ's Church. Preferences, indeed, there will always be. We shall never be able to eliminate what may be termed "the personal equation" from the ministry. But when we hear of persons who are so strongly prejudiced against a public servant of Christ, because of his manner and style, or whatever it may be that does not suit their taste, that they claim they cannot be benefited by his ministrations, and question his sincerity, whether he actually believes what he preaches, we confess a feeling of impatience. "Who is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?" are words found in the Scriptures. Sorry, indeed, when we are so concerned about the physical frame, the tone of speech, and other mannerisms, the length or the brevity of his discourses, and other outward trappings that we quite overlook what he is preaching about, and the purposes of the ministry, — sorry and uncharitable this is. Let such hypercritical people just put themselves for a few weeks or days in the place of God's servant, and they would be readily cured. He is not sufficiently friendly, and if he is very friendly, he is only seeking to make himself popular. As long as a minister preaches the Word of God in its truth and purity, carefully prepares his sermons, and delivers them to the best of his ability; as long as he seeks, even though with imperfections of conduct and occasional mistakes of judgment, to adorn the Word he preaches with a godly example and life, how unreasonable and unjust is it to make his defects and faults an excuse for absence from the assembling of ourselves together! Yet, is this not done, alas! often done?

Again, not only the minister, but the members, too, are at fault with such persons. Some of them are proud, carry their heads too high, and some are not what they profess to be, — if the minister only knew it, — and scores of other and most glaring inconsistencies might be trumped up against those who pass through the church-doors, worshiping the God of heaven according

to His direction. And what they are charged with is, in a measure, true. Those who are regularly to be seen in their pews are not what they wish to be, and none realize that more acutely and admit it with greater genuine sorrow than they, and for that very purpose they come hither and confess their sins and kneel at this altar to receive absolution and strength from on high to overcome their inborn weaknesses. The Church is not a gallery where perfect saints are mounted on pedestals to be admired and made over. And yet, to charge the members of Christ's Church with all sorts of delinquencies of character and conduct, just to have a plaster to put over one's own shortcomings and disobedience of God's laws, is hypocritical and most unfair. The best people, if God's Word is true, — and our knowledge and observation coincides therewith, — are in the Church, and if there are some unworthy persons in it, it is not the fault of the Church, and there is more hope for them there than anywhere else. But for any one to pretend to remain away on their account, such a one had better examine himself as to his own supposedly noble and unblemished character, especially in regard to charity. It is a very common and ancient habit of ours, dating back to Adam and Eve, to put the blame on some one else and to admire one's own feathers. But it is not honest.

Another excuse why the seat of some is vacant, when it ought to be occupied when the congregation assembles in the house of God according to the Lord's direction, is contained in the word "recreation." It is a pleasant word and exactly expresses the idea. Recreation is just re-creation. Something which re-creates, renews, refreshes us for the great purposes of life. The archer must unstring his bow if it is not to lose its elastic power. The farmer knows the benefits of allowing a field to lie fallow for a season, and the time is not wasted which is spent in rational recreation. The profit appears when we come back to our work with stronger bodies, clearer heads, steadier nerves, and lighter hearts. Let this be said in all frankness to both sexes. "Bodily exercise," wrote the Apostle Paul, "profiteth little," a little.

But having said so much by way of commendation, it behooves us to say something by way of caution, and that is that recreation must not interfere with our duties toward God. A man may be a cyclist or an ardent automobilist; he may go fishing and rowing; he may enjoy playing ball. Yet these diversions ought not to cause him to neglect divine worship and to desecrate the Lord's day.

When they do that, they are no longer innocent and harmless, but harmful. We must ever bear in mind as Christians that a moral and religious phase connects with everything we do. "Whether, therefore, ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." If you cannot, leave it undone. "What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" So, then, let there be no miscalculation here. We are answerable to God for our recreation as we are for everything else. Let us well attend to our ways in this respect; let it be a matter of conscience, of Christian example, of upholding the honor of God's Law and the sanctity of His house.

And what pertains to recreation pertains also to the opposite: work, and fatigue caused by work. Labor is a blessing. In most callings there may be times and seasons when extra exertion is necessary. But to let labor habitually interfere or to become so fatigued from the labors of the preceding week that we cannot faithfully attend the sacred services, is doing injustice to ourselves and dishonor to God. It behooves us to conduct ourselves in such a way that we make the Lord's day answer the end for which it has been set apart. You can labor enough during the six days for the support of these frail, decaying bodies without encroaching on the season of holy meditation and worship. Excessive business and bodily fatigue ought therefore not to keep us from the assembling of ourselves together. Such an excuse will not be satisfactory in the court of conscience or of Heaven.

But why continue to enumerate such idle pretexts, which could easily be multiplied indefinitely? Let us come to the core of the matter, the real reason.

2.

Most attractively the Gospel is set forth in the Scripture-lesson of to-day under the figure of a great supper, an exquisitely furnished banquet. Everything that was in season and palatable adorned the festal board. So spiritually in the Church: Pardon of sins, favor with God, peace of conscience, renewal of heart, access to the Throne of Grace, the comforts of the Holy Ghost, the great and precious promises and truths of Holy Scripture, a well-grounded hope of eternal life — these and many others are the exquisite blessings which crown the Gospel-table as it is spread before us in this banquet-hall of Christ's Church. Yet excused from — why? In reality because there was a lack of appreciation of the banquet, a feeling of indifference; those who had been invited

to the banquet made light of it. Other matters were uppermost in their minds and exacted their foremost attention, and so they could not — rather, to be truthful, would not — come. It is so to-day. Indifference is as much an evil in the twentieth as in the first century. That which is highly valued has a frequent and warm place in our thoughts; it is often in our minds. Not so with that about which we are indifferent. Of what value are victuals, be they ever so choice, if we have no appetite, no hunger and thirst for them? You do not care to receive them. And how can you expect to enjoy the spiritual food which God dispenses on His day and in His house if you have no spiritual appetite, no hunger and thirst for it? If during the week we allow only the steady stream of thoughts about business and gain, the thoughts of family, fields, and flocks, of clerks and clients, of customers and machinery, to troop through our minds; if in the morning, or as we retire at night, and during the day we do not soar away to higher thoughts than those with which our hands are occupied; if, to speak with the parable, the Gospel-feast is not in all our thoughts, or if we consider it only a dull and lifeless thing, not the one thing needful, that which has a right to the first place in our heart, — then it is not to be wondered at that absence from God's house is a matter of little concern to us. Sad to say, this is the case not only with some; their number has increased with the centuries.

Be alive, then, and guard against indifference. Within us is lodged a most deceitful enemy, and without is another, who hates the Lord's day and the Lord's house, hates Christ's Gospel-feast, and whom nothing pleases more than when, with the old Adam within us, he can keep a Christian from attending divine services. Ever bear in mind that you are dealing in this place with matters of vital importance, life and salvation, your happiness here and hereafter; that the moments you spend here are the most profitable for your temporal and eternal welfare.

Nor is this all that is to be considered. Every person is answerable for his example, which is a powerful influence for either good or bad. May the words spoken serve to warn us against the sinful habit of making excuses!

For the love of a heavenly Father, who has designed this blessed feast, from the grace and sacrifice of a Savior, who at such great cost has provided it, and from the kind and urgent solicitations of the Holy Ghost, who through His servants invites you to

come to the house of God regularly and conscientiously, for God's sake, for your own sake, and for the sake of others, I would exhort you to obey His summons and not to make light of it, but to be present as a matter of conscience, duty, and delight at the assembling of ourselves together at the blessed feast of God's provision on earth, until His summons shall reach us to come and sit down at His blessed feast on high. Then we shall receive the commendation of our Lord. Who would not receive it? Let us be faithful servants, then, while on earth below we wander, till we sing His praises yonder. Amen.

Third Sunday after Trinity.

Jesus went unto the Mount of Olives. And early in the morning He came again into the Temple, and all the people came unto Him; and He sat down and taught them. And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto Him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, they say unto Him: Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now, Moses in the Law commanded us that such should be stoned; but what sayest Thou? This they said, tempting Him, that they might have to accuse Him. But Jesus stooped down and with His finger wrote on the ground, as though He heard them not. So when they continued asking Him, He lifted up Himself and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had lifted up Himself and saw none but the woman, He said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee; go and sin no more.

John 8, 1—11.

Jesus, we are informed in the opening verse of our text, had spent the entire night on the Mount of Olives. Hither, after a day's hard toil in the Temple, He had resorted from the taunts and threats of a rude and caviling audience to refresh His tired spirit by communion with God in prayer. But "early in the morning," the Sacred Record informs us, He was ready to resume His work for God and the souls of men; not one hour did He waste in His glorious life's mission of instruction and benevolence. Directly when He resumed His ministry, His enemies renewed their bitterest opposition. Having commenced speaking to the assembly, He was interrupted by an unusual and very subtle episode. "The scribes

and Pharisees had brought unto Him a woman taken in adultery" and, arraigning her in His presence, invited His judicial decision. "When they had set her in the midst, they say unto Him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act." The proof of her sin was indisputable, even as the guilt of it was most heinous. And correctly do the scribes quote the statute bearing on the case: "Moses in the Law commanded us that such should be stoned"; but, Master, they add, favor us with Thy opinion. Let us have Thy judgment. What sayest *Thou?* In this seemingly simple and deferential question there lurked Jesuitical craft, the depth of Satan. Nothing but a malignant plot it was, skilfully devised to entangle the Great Teacher, in the hope of founding an accusation against Him. You will note the treacherous duplicity of the query: Master, *Moses* said so and so, but what sayest *Thou?* If Jesus would have confirmed Moses' command that the sentence of the Law be executed against the woman, they, in all likelihood, would have informed Pontius Pilate, the governor, against Him as being a man who arrogated to Himself the power over life and death, a prerogative of which the Roman Government had deprived the Jews. On the other hand, if Jesus would have acquitted the criminal, absolved her from the penalty of death, His adversaries would have taken occasion to scandalize His name; with some show of propriety they would have held Him up to the people as an enemy of Mosaic Law, as a patron of profligacy and sin.

Now, how does the Holy and Just One act in the dilemma into which His enemies have placed Him? Answering not a word, He "wrote on the ground." What He wrote in the dust on the Temple floor we do not know. The Savior does not tell us, and conjecture is idle. Neither does it lead us anywhere to discuss whether the writing was in ordinary letters, forming words, or in illegible characters. There is no record of any bystander's having deciphered the writing. Not in the matter of it lay the lesson, but in the fact and manner of His writing. Once, it is significant to note, in the Old Testament Jehovah wrote; that was upon Mount Sinai. Once in the New Testament Jesus wrote, even here; and here as then the writing was with a finger and on tables of stone; the Temple floor was of stone. What did it express? Interpreted by the few words subsequently uttered by Jesus, His silent writing on the Temple pavement implied: You quote Moses' commandment. It was My Law which he wrote. See, here is the finger; it can still write, and that against *you*, who are so swift

to write judgments against others. And then He lifted up Himself and said to them: "He that is without sin [literally, this very kind of sin] among you, let him first cast a stone at her." And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. Feeling their own guilt and put to shame, the whole group scattered, giving us an insight into the morals of that time, which were so corrupt that even among the zealous religious officials who undertook the prosecution of this woman there was not one but had transgressed in a similar licentious manner. The finger of the Lord Jesus, writing on the ground, was to them what the handwriting on the wall was to King Belshazzar and his lords in Babylon, namely, the pronouncing of doom. And when the written sentence was followed up by the words from His lips, abashed and convicted by that inward monitor that makes cowards of us all, conscience, they slunk away "one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last; and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst." Here you have one of those choice episodes in the Gospel records that lend such a delightful charm to the character of our Lord and yield a wealth of instruction to the devout and inquiring soul. Three thoughts would we, in these sacred moments, dwell upon: —

1. That the sinner must needs dread the verdict of God;
2. That Jesus alone is the court of the sinner's appeal;
3. That the sinner must seek that court now.

1.

This woman, we hear, was arraigned in the presence of Christ. Her accusers placed her "in the midst," directly in front of where Jesus sat and taught; and they publicly, in the hearing of the entire assembly, stated the indictment. How, if there was a spark of womanhood within her, her head must have sunk down in conscious guilt and her cheek burned with shame! She would have been thankful if the Temple pavement had opened beneath her feet and entombed her. But there was no escape. She had to await the word of doom, the passing of the sentence.

Is not our situation parallel to that woman's? We may not have committed the crime she is charged with, but the fact of our sinfulness is as indisputable as was hers. All of us have sinned. There is not a just man upon earth who doeth good and sinneth not. Nor are the accusers lacking. Within each of us there is that powerful witness from whose stinging accusation there is no appeal

or escape; those Ten Words inscribed upon stony tables, according to which standard we are directed to consider our station, "whether you are a father, mother, son, daughter, master, mistress, servant; whether you have been disobedient, unfaithful, slothful; whether you have grieved any person by word or deed; whether you have stolen, neglected or wasted aught, or done other injury." And, besides, that old Evil Foe, our adversary, the devil, of whom the Epistle-lesson of to-day speaks, is constantly assailing us. How these accusers rise up and testify against us! And the verdict is never in doubt. The penal sentence has gone forth: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." Moses has so spoken. Justice so demands. Before the tribunal of the Lord, the righteous Judge, we should stand with downcast eyes and feelings of guilt and shame, like this sin-stained transgressor. "I was afraid, . . . and I hid myself," was the confession of the first sinner, whose transgression unparadised our race and excommunicated man from the favor of the Most High. And it is this same feeling of being afraid that possesses every child of Adam. "Lord, enter not into judgment with Thy servant." "If Thou shouldest mark iniquity, O Lord, who shall stand?" "I, the Lord, thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me." So it is written. So it is. In this accused and culprit woman, condemned by the Law of Moses, we have a fitting picture of ourselves.

2.

But, continuing this most expressive incident which sets forth the blessed Gospel-truth, it was significant that these treacherous scribes and Pharisees brought the woman taken in adultery to Jesus. Though they did not understand the hidden and deep meaning of their act, they appealed from Moses to Christ; they threw the case into the Supreme Court. And the verdict? "When Jesus had lifted up Himself and saw none but the woman, He said unto her, 'Woman, where are those thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee?' She said, 'No man, Lord.' And Jesus said unto her, 'Neither do I condemn thee; go and sin no more.'" Precious words to the trembling, abashed criminal! On no other occasion was the wisdom and mercy of our Lord more illustriously displayed. Examining the words a little closer, we find that primarily they refer to the *civil* penalty which Jesus had been asked to confirm against the culprit, whether she should be stoned. He was not

a magistrate, and so He declined to assume the functions of that office for the punishment of evil-doers. Hence He said to the guilty woman: "Hath no man accused thee?" Have these officials of the law desisted from prosecuting thee and left thee in My hands? Well, woman, it is not My mission, not in My province, to administer the law and adjudge its penalties. "Neither do I condemn thee." And yet, when we remember that according to the letter of the Jewish law the civil death penalty carried with it religious reprobation, the words of our Lord also matchlessly set forth His character in the light which this Sunday would impress upon us — as the Friend of sinners. If there was no man to cast the stone of condemnation and death upon this woman, surely the merciful Redeemer will not do so. The Good Shepherd, who came to seek the lost sheep, was surely not the One to slay it when He had found it, even though it lay in a horrible pit and miry clay, with its fleece soiled and torn. Nor is it to be charged that our Savior, in the treatment of this sinner, showed questionable leniency. Far from extenuating the crime of the adulteress, He emphasizes it. Discharging the sinful woman, "Go," He solemnly admonishes her, "Sin no more." And a more decisive censure, a more emphatic reproof of her past profligacy could not have been uttered. He pardoned the criminal, but did not palliate the crime.

And there, in that Gospel of pardon, of forgiveness, rests *our* hope and *our* pardon. Trembling we look from Sinai to Calvary, from the Lawgiver of the Old Testament to the Mediator of the New Covenant. Trustfully we place our case in the hands of that selfsame divine Advocate and Spokesman. All judgment rests in His hands. His voice will decide our doom. Death and life are in the power of His tongue. What though there are many voices testifying against you, an accusing conscience, an accusing Law, and the infernal accuser. Here is the Son of Man, come to seek and to save that which is lost. To pity and to pardon, to show mercy and to provide salvation, was His mission, His life's errand. Though His countenance was stern as steel against sin and the breath of His lips like fire against every form and quality of evil, He was, nevertheless, avowedly and unmistakably the Friend of sinners. He pitied their misery, He mourned their unbelief, He urged them to repentance, He promised them forgiveness, He agonized for their redemption, and He died upon the cross to secure for them eternal life. "This man receiveth sinners!" was the scoffing taunt of the self-righteous Pharisees. But what they

saw was superbly true. The Holy One did not disdain to be left alone, as it says, with this sinful woman and spoke the most heart-cheering comfort to her. "Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out", no matter what the amount or the enormity of the crime. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Oh, that a single sin-stained soul, encouraged by such gracious words of assurance and promise, should hesitate or refuse to come to Him! That leads us to our final consideration.

3.

The Temple, we are told, is the place where this guilty woman was arraigned before Christ. Happy for her that she had an interview with Him there, and that her first meeting with the Lord was not at the bar of the great white throne above. That ultimate interview is inevitable. "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the Judgment." "We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ." And that meeting is as terrible as it is inevitable. "The ungodly shall not stand in the Judgment." The Lamb of God, which now, in the time accepted, taketh away the sins of the world, shall be the Lion of the tribe of Judah then. A loving, merciful Redeemer, able to save them to the uttermost who come unto God by Him, is accessible in His Temple *now;* for "where two or three are gathered together in My name," He says, "there am I in the midst of them." Therefore, "seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near." Do not postpone an interview with Him. Alas! for the thousands of our fellow-creatures who would carry their sins wrapped around them to the last, hoping to shuffle them off in the death struggle as they do this mortal coil, which drops into the grave. It is a vain hope. Death is no passport admitting you to heaven. There is only one passport, and that is faith in Him who loved us and gave Himself for us, and who justifies us from all things from which we could not be justified by the Law of Moses; who instituted a Church upon earth and a ministry and means of grace, His precious Gospel and the Sacraments, in all of which provisions sounds forth His invitation: "Come unto Me, . . . and I will give you rest," salvation, eternal life. And we should shun His Church, shun His established ministry, reject and neglect His Gospel when it is preached and His Sacraments when they are administered? Make Him your Friend now; entrust your souls into His hands

this day, so that on that Great Day, before the bar of the righteous Judge of the quick and the dead, when He will solemnly ask, "Where are thine accusers?" you will be ready in humble triumph to respond in the words of the apostle's challenge: "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." Blessed, eternally blessed, the soul that can now sing these lines: —

Bold shall I stand on that Great Day,
For who aught to my charge shall lay?
Fully absolved through Christ I am
From sin and guilt, from fear and shame.

Amen.

Fourth Sunday after Trinity.

Yet all this availeth me nothing so long as I see Mordecai, the Jew, sitting at the king's gate. — *Esther 5, 13.*

Nowhere will you find a more striking illustration of human character than in the story from which our text is taken. To lead up to it: Ahasuerus was at this time king of Assyria, or Medo-Persia, a mighty empire, comprising 127 provinces. His prime minister, second in power and influence, in whose hands were chiefly the affairs of state, and who was the instrument of royal favor to others, was one Haman. But notwithstanding his great elevation there was one circumstance which embittered all his enjoyments and rendered him completely wretched amid the glory of his riches and power. To quote his own words in the language of the text: "Yet all this availeth me nothing so long as I see Mordecai, the Jew, sitting at the king's gate."

The person whom he refers to was the nearest relative of Queen Esther, whom he had befriended and treated as a daughter. A true Jew, he had religious scruples against bowing to Haman, an Amalekite, doing him homage in Oriental fashion, by prostrating himself before him, an act which implied worship, and therefore refused him such homage. This lack of reverence poisoned all the comforts of the exalted prime minister and rendered him unhappy beyond endurance. Not that he considered Mordecai in the light of a rival, who might one day endanger his

standing with the king, — Mordecai, in his eye, was nothing but a feeble and despicable Jew, — but that a man of low degree, a foreigner at that, should have the audacity to refuse homage to him in defiance of the king's authority, was not this act an indication that the next Jew he met might repeat the indignity? He would not stand for it. This resentment sank so deep into his bosom that he conceived the horrid purpose of exterminating, wiping out, the entire Jewish nation (then scattered throughout the empire) by one general massacre.

We are shocked at the boldness and cruelty of the design and not less astonished at the consent of the king to that shameful plot of Haman. He was satisfied with the arrangement, just so the royal treasury would not suffer. But such, as the history of other times has shown us, was the disregard sometimes paid to human life by the potentates of the earth when their own private feelings or interests, as they imagined, called for the sacrifice. The sacred historian informs us that after the decree was issued, "the king and Haman sat down to eat and to drink," as if only some ordinary business had been transacted.

And what was now to be done in the face of such a decree? The story tells us that the pious Mordecai rends his clothes and "puts on sackcloth with ashes" and, going into the streets of the city, utters a loud and bitter cry. His example is followed by all the Jews, who give themselves to fasting, mourning, and weeping. Covered with his garments of grief and sorrow, Mordecai presents himself at the king's gate, which circumstance is mentioned to Esther, who, as you know from the story, then puts her life in her hand and ventures into the presence of the king. God so turns the king's heart that she finds favor with the king and the petition for herself and her people is heard. Haman's plot is defeated, and the very evils he had meditated against Mordecai and his countrymen are brought upon himself and his friends. So remarkable was the deliverance that the Israelites throughout the world to this day keep a memorial of it in their annual feast of Purim, which sometimes occurs in the last part of February, sometimes in the first part of March. As a display of God's watchful and overruling providence over His people and the importance of their seeking Him by prayer in every time of darkness and trouble it is an event which well deserves the attention of Christians as well as Israelites. But the reflections which we purpose to make shall be in accord with the persons.

1.

If we seek the root of the evil in the case of this Haman, we shall find that it was lodged in that passion which is the parent of many other sins, *viz.*, pride. We know nothing of this man's early history or of the circumstances which paved the way to his advancement; but had he been a man of principle, he would have respected the conscientiousness of Mordecai's acts, even though he might have laughed at what he regarded the smallness of the scruple. But what is hardly so much as a mole-hill to others to a proud spirit appears a mountain. What others would not so much as notice is felt by such a one with great keenness. More than half the miseries of life may be traced to this corrupt source. We are so exceedingly sensitive, so very "touchy," that the slightest infringement upon or infraction of, our dignity wounds us to the quick, and like Haman, what we ought to excuse or laugh away, we are bent on revenging. Indeed, you will find, after a little diagnosis and analysis of yourselves, that there are very few cases in which our troubles do not originate in our own evil dispositions or are greatly augmented by them. Whenever we find ourselves unhappy, greatly fretted, it would be wise for us to inquire whether our unhappiness does not arise from some blamable cause in ourselves, some evil temper or disposition, which it becomes us to subdue and eject. This employment would certainly be a good exchange for that in which unsatisfied and unhappy persons are often engaged, that of indulging in a spirit of detraction and slander, of venting themselves in unkind wishes and reproaches and imputing all their troubles to the sins and imperfections of those with whom they are associated.

People sometimes think that pride is no great sin; some almost speak of it as if it were half a virtue. But this and other histories abundantly prove that it is the germ of other evils worse than itself, and therefore we ought to be on our guard against allowing ourselves to become its victims and counteract it by the contrary spirit, which is humility. A sovereign antidote to the hundred and one mortifications of this life is to think moderately and modestly of our talents and attainments, to dwell more upon our defects than upon our perfections, and to speak oftener of our delinquencies and shortcomings than of our wonderful performances and exploits.

"Be clothed with humility," says the apostle. That apparel is

most suitable and becoming for those who are so absolutely dependent upon the blessings of Heaven, and who, after all, have received from God what they are and have. That is the first quality we would note — humility.

2.

The next is mercy. We are disposed to look upon this Haman as a monster as regards guilt; and so he was. We are startled at the devilish device which would have blotted out a whole nation by a general massacre, just to revenge himself upon one man. We are astonished at the frigid indifference with which he could deliver to the sword thousands upon thousands of innocent women and children, fellow-men, without being touched by pity or remorse, merely because a single individual had wounded his pride and thwarted his selfishness. Of such crimes the human heart is capable. Yes, my dear hearers, of such wrong also your heart is capable if left unrestrained. In this prime minister of Assyria you have a clear uncovering of the dreadful tendency of an ambitious and selfish heart, of man's heart by nature. What is there that it will not sacrifice and do to gratify its wishes and resentments? What bonds are so sacred, what interests and relations so dear that it will not trample under foot and destroy when they are opposed to its views and aims? It has but one law, one aim — its own aggrandized views, regardless of what may become of the interests of others.

The Haman spirit of revenge and selfishness is still alive in all of us, though it may not, because its scope and sphere is not the same, so hideously manifest itself. Does not this spirit, which so summarily sought satisfaction in the violent destruction of those Jewish subjects, and which we call "revenge," show itself even among Christians in a thousand petty acts of spite and ill will, which fall as perfectly under this designation as the most flagrant deeds of wrathful retaliation? If I refuse to speak to my offending brother, but pass him by in silent scorn, is that not revenge? If I take pleasure in talking of his faults and infirmities and delight in depreciating his character and abilities in the estimation of others, is that not revenge? If I watch for opportunities to get "even" with him; if I rejoice in having caused him any inconvenience or pain or, on his account, cherish any unkind feelings toward his family or his friends, is that not the spirit of Haman, the opposite of that to which Holy Scriptures exhort us: "Be ye merciful, even as your Father in heaven is merciful"?

As one has well said: "Revenge is a word which the Christian ought to blot out of his vocabulary with his own penitential tears or with the drops of his gratitude for the pardon he has received from God." Provocations, indignities, injuries, unkind censures, are plentiful, and our perverted nature is always ready to pay back such as have insulted or harmed us in their own coin. But this is not the spirit of Christ, who was the incarnation of mercy and whose Gospel enjoins love to enemies. This does not mean that we are not to defend our person, property, and reputation from malicious assaults, in which case resistance is not merely retaliation, but lawful self-preservation, but for the most part we are to suppress wrathful vindictiveness, severity, the Haman spirit. That is the second lesson: mercifulness, forbearance, kindness.

3.

The third lesson we gather from this piece of history is contentment. Nothing is more common than for men to imagine that with greater honor, wealth, and independence there is also greater happiness. Nothing is farther from the truth; indeed, the very opposite is most frequently the case; outward prosperity and promotion to high honors often make people less happy than they were before. Take this Haman as a case in point. "All this availeth me nothing," he said. Notwithstanding his rank, his exalted position, and his wealth he was most miserable and distressed.

Contentment will cure us of all envying and fretting over the great success and prosperity of our neighbor; it will put an end to that excessive care and fatigue in laboring for a life of independence which to attain is the object of so many people's ambition and disquietude; it will cause us to drop the false opinion that such a life of independence, outward success, and prosperity affords greater enjoyment and happiness. When will people learn that "a man's life does not consist in the abundance of the things which he possesses," whether of riches or honor, but in the state and disposition of mind?

Nor is this all. Let it be fixed in our minds that genuine happiness is not to be found in worldly possessions and enjoyments; that if we had all the wealth and honor and influence of Haman, a Mordecai or some other person, who may make us more wretched than before, will still be found in the gate. In this connection we would turn our attention within and seek and cultivate those dispo-

sitions from which all true happiness flows. In other words, we should not neglect our spiritual and eternal interests in the pursuit of inferior matters. Our foremost and constant aim must be to know the state of our own hearts, our relation to God, our standing with Him, and to seek His grace which bringeth salvation, to believe in our blessed Savior, and then to follow His footsteps, His example. Thus only can we poor, miserable sinners lay a foundation for tranquillity, by living close with Him, who alone can instil tranquillity and humility into the human heart.

Here, then, you have the direct and most certain way to contentment, tranquillity, and happiness. Nothing else will avail you.

4.

Finally, what a living and striking illustration this narrative is on the words of to-day's Gospel-lesson: "Judge not, and ye shall not be judged; condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned." "Behold, the gallows, fifty cubits high, which Haman had made for Mordecai, standeth in the house of Haman." "Hang him thereon!" was the verdict. There are familiar proverbs, which say: "Ashes always fly back in the face of him who throws them," and: "If one will sow thorns, he had better not walk barefoot."

After all, judgment and condemnation do not rest with us. They are God's prerogative. To Him we can safely entrust the decision. For us to usurp His authority and to proceed severely will bring back condemnation on our own souls from Him and from our fellow-men.

As we mingle with the great mass of our fellow-men, fellow-sufferers, fellow-sinners, let us be found at the feet of Him who is infinitely merciful. Let us seek mercy and endeavor to practise the same quality toward others in thought, speech, and action. Amen.

Fifth Sunday after Trinity.

I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first and also to the Greek. — *Rom. 1, 16.*

If, my beloved hearers, upon a certain morning in the spring of the year 58 after the birth of Christ we would have stood as observers in the spacious harbor of the city of Corinth, in Greece, we would have witnessed a scene which at the time looked quite

commonplace. Beside one of the wharves lay a ship just on the point of sailing for Italy. The sailors are hustling about in obedience to their captain's orders, while the passengers are taking leave of their friends on shore. Of the various groups gathered there, our attention is riveted upon one. The central figure is a middle-aged woman, evidently one of the intended passengers. Around her are assembled several friends, who have come down to the harbor to see her off. Among these is a man, little in stature, insignificant in general appearance, but with a face of deep intelligence and resolute will. As he bids farewell to the woman just mentioned, he draws from beneath his arm a roll of parchment, which he gives to her with careful instruction as to its delivery. Then the last farewells are spoken, the passengers step on board, and the vessel, with hoisted sails, glides slowly from the shore, cutting her way across the blue waters of the Gulf of Corinth. — What was the name of that vessel and what kind of cargo she carried, I know not and feel little interested in, but this would I state, that, unknown to the captain and the crew, she carried on board a treasure more precious to the world than a shipload of the purest gold. That little man with the striking face, referred to as standing on the wharf, was Paul, the great apostle of the Gentiles. The woman to whom he spoke was Phoebe, the deaconess of the church at Cenchrea, while the roll of manuscript which Paul handed to Phoebe was the epistle which lies before you, the epistle which Paul wrote from Corinth to the church which was in Rome, an epistle so important to the future of Christianity that Phoebe, as she sailed from Corinth, as one writer says, "carried beneath the fold of her robe the whole future of Christian theology." The letter begins with the greetings of the apostle to the church at Rome; next he expresses his desire to preach the Gospel in their midst, and for this desire he states the reason in the language of the text, the 16th verse of the first chapter, which may furnish us, on closer examination, some thoughts suitable for our reflection.

In order to appreciate the true worth of this declaration, we must consider the circumstances under which it was made. For a Christian, these days, to say that he is "not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ" may be no great proof of courage or devotion. Christianity has now gained a tremendous hold upon the world. It is interwoven with our social institutions, it is defended by vast and powerful interests, it is bulwarked by strongest sentiments. However, when Paul penned that declaration, everything was

different. The Gospel was a new religion. It had just sprung up in Judea, among a people hated and despised by all other nations. Its Founder had been crucified as a malefactor, a sort of death inflicted only on criminals of the lowest grade and of the worst character. Its followers were few and for the most part from the humblest walks of life; its ministers were not philosophers or statesmen, but men of obscure birth and of no pretension whatever to human learning or worldly greatness. Morever, the Gospel itself was an unsocial, uncompromising religion. It waged direct and open war upon every other form of religion. It summoned the Jew to renounce his confidence in the gorgeous rites and ceremonies of Judaism and to fall down before the cross as furnishing the only hope of salvation. It summoned the Gentile to cast away his idols as vain and worthless and to change his whole sentiments and habits of life if he would escape the wrath to come and save his soul. In a word, the Gospel met all men alike on one common condition of pardon and life, repentance of sin, and faith in a crucified Savior.

It is easy to see that such a system of religion, in such circumstances, must awaken opposition and hatred and expose its advocates to ineffable scorn and reproach. To the Jews it was a stumbling-block and to the Greeks foolishness. Wherever the apostles went as heralds of the Gospel, they encountered ignominy and opposition and were accounted as the filth and offscouring of the earth. In those days it was a mark of high moral courage, to stand forth as its bold, uncompromising advocate, especially, let it be emphasized, at Rome. Located on her seven hills, in queenly majesty, with her magnificent temples and marble palaces, the mighty heart of all civilization, sending out the throb of life to the extremities of the then known world, she was its mistress and capital. And not only was she the center of human power and greatness, but of the most extended and deep-rooted system of idolatry. It was in Rome that paganism found its fullest expression. And now conceive of a poor, unknown Christian preacher, standing in the crowded streets or in some little chapel of this majestic and imperial city, the very citadel and headquarters of Satan, lifting up his voice in proclamation of the new Gospel of Christ. I repeat, poor, unknown Christian preacher. We are apt to conceive in our day of Paul, the missionary, as encircled from the first with a certain halo of greatness and glory. When he went from city to city, he did not go like some proud bishop

visiting his diocese, clothed in the robes of office and riding in a chariot of state. He went as a poor stranger, meanly clad, dusty, footsore. And when he arrived in any new place, his first task in all likelihood was this, not to placard the walls with the announcements that the celebrated evangelist Paul had just arrived, but to go through the streets from shop to shop, trying to get some work to do as a weaver, so that by the labor of his own hands he might earn enough bread to keep body and soul together while he was preaching Christ in that city. And yet, in spite of these tremendous handicaps, exposing himself to persecution, shame, reproach, yes, even martyrdom, he declared himself willing to preach the Gospel also to the Romans, there to gather converts to Christ as he had done among other Gentiles. The reason for this is disclosed in the text. The Gospel was regarded by Paul as the *power of God,* "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth."

1.

Power is of two kinds, physical and moral. Physical power is the application of force. I raise a weight from the ground, I move this Bible with my hand, I project a body into the air by the force of my arm. Each of these actions is an exhibition of physical force. Moral power is the application of motives to the mind. I wish to persuade a man, for example, to become a Christian; I reason with him, I address his understanding, and lay before him such considerations as are adapted to awaken his conscience, influence his will, and move him to act in accordance with the object to be attained. This is an example of moral power. It is hardly necessary to say that it is moral power which is meant in the text. It is the power of truth, embodied in the revelation which God has given of His Son, our Savior, which is the means of reconciling men to Himself and fitting them for His service and kingdom.

And which — it might be well for us to consider this — are some of the specific elements of power contained in the Gospel? We shall mention two. The one element is the character in which it places God. God is a holy God, and He is a just God. Viewed simply in this character, there is nothing to attract sinners to Him; rather, every attribute of His nature is arrayed against them and would operate only to drive them to despair. The Law tells them of an almighty, just, and holy God, but does not tell of His mercy and grace in Christ Jesus, for the sake of whose

merits He is willing to pardon sin and save the sinner. This is made known only in the Gospel, and this presents Him to our view in the infinite attractions of His love and tenderness and bids us, guilty and lost sinners that we are, to come to Him as to a God who desires to be gracious and who is ready to welcome our return to Him with a free and full pardon of sin and the joys of His everlasting friendship and love. This is an element of mighty power in the Gospel.

Another element of power in the Gospel is the view it presents of the character and work of the Son of God, our Savior. Not only does it tell us that we may be saved, but also how we may be saved, namely, through the atoning blood and intercession of our Lord Jesus Christ, who loved us and gave Himself into death for us. This is the great theme which the apostles continually emphasized in all their communications to men, and which, wherever it has been preached, has been found to be of mighty efficacy. It is Christ crucified, Christ risen from the dead, Christ living and reigning in glory to make intercession for us, to fit us for His presence in heaven, that constitutes the grand peculiarity of the Gospel; and account for it as we may, the fact is unquestionable that this Gospel-truth possesses a power to subdue the heart of man and bring him back to holiness and God, which stamps as weakness all the proud teachings of philosophy and speculations of man.

To come to the effect produced by the Gospel. Was not Paul, the writer, himself an example? Proud, self-righteous, self-willed, a blasphemer and a persecutor, how completely was he changed into a humble follower of the Savior, wholly devoted to the service of his new Master, willing to spend and be spent in promoting that cause which he once labored to destroy! And his is only one of the millions of like characters that might be cited. The Gospel has gone in among the ice-bound inhabitants of Greenland, among the degraded inhabitants of Southern Africa, among the various tribes of American Indians, among the voluptuous Asiatics, and the wild savages in the islands of the Pacific, and by the mere influence of its power, applied by the Holy Spirit to the heart and mind, has led forth multitudes of disciples for the Lord Jesus. It is simply miraculous to see how some countries have undergone a change. Where are now their idols? In the museums of missionary societies, as trophies of the victory of the Cross, or cast aside by those who once adored them.

2.

And now, having regarded the truth set forth in the text, let us observe a few of the many practical lessons which it suggests. In the first place, it is a solemn thing to preach and to hear the Gospel. The minister of Christ, whenever he meets his people to preach to them the Gospel, brings before them a message of mighty power; a message which will prove to every one of them a savor of life unto life or of death unto death, the means of eternal glory or of an aggravated condemnation. There is no avoiding this issue. In its nature and design it is intended to renew, to sanctify, to fit the soul for an eternal residence in God's kingdom. But like other gifts of God it may be perverted and abused, and then it operates with terrible power to harden and form the soul into a vessel of wrath, fitted for destruction. There is no agency on earth so important and momentous as that which is employed in preparing immortal souls for the decisions of the final Judgment; and there is no situation on earth so deeply solemn and critical as that in which men are placed when a power like that of the Gospel is brought to bear upon them. And this is the work that is going on in this house of worship. May we who preach and you who hear, my friends, ever bear it in mind; we are doing a work for eternity, to the everlasting joy or sorrow of each one of us.

Nor is this all, our preaching and your hearing of the Gospel. Another tremendous responsibility attaches to this. Our Lord, departing this world from Mount Olivet, gave the solemn charge: "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature." That command has never been revoked. It is in as full force to-day as when originally given; nor does it affect only those to whom it was originally given. It pertains to all, to each and every one of us. Not a man, woman, or child is exempt. No Christian has truly entered into the spirit of Christ's Gospel and His holy religion as long as he or she remains uninterested and indifferent with reference to the wants of the godless millions of our fellow-beings who are perishing in this and other countries for lack of the preaching of the Gospel and the knowledge of the truth which the Church of Christ alone has, and which it has been commanded to give to all men. We cannot dwell upon this too often. It is surprising, as it is also alarming, how little those who have been saved by the Gospel and possess it are affected by their Lord's direction as to its spread. The missionary phase, especially as to foreign fields, has occupied but comparatively little of our Church's

attention and activity. Our members, on the whole, have hitherto manifested but little interest in this divinely appointed work. Wide is the territory which is open for us; heartrending are the appeals that come from our mission-fields in South America, India, and China. It is only by men converted through the Gospel that this saving message of God's grace in Christ Jesus will be brought to men who are still unconverted. Little enough there is for us to do, who are asked to support those who are carrying out Christ's command to preach the Gospel to all creatures. We should be ashamed of the Gospel, ashamed in giving it our whole-souled consideration? Having experienced it as "the power of God unto salvation" in our own heart, we should be indifferent, lukewarm, to aid in bringing its blessings to others? May the Lord open our eyes and warm our hearts and fill us with a love for His saving Word and with the resolve to carry out the Master's commission by our prayers, by our contributions, by our own personal endeavors! Let us make the declaration of that valiant confessor of old our aim: "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." Amen.

Sixth Sunday after Trinity.

And, behold, one came and said unto Him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life? And He said unto him, Why callest thou Me good? There is none good but one, that is God. But if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. He saith unto Him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder; Thou shalt not commit adultery; Thou shalt not steal; Thou shalt not bear false witness; Honor thy father and thy mother; and, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. The young man saith unto Him, All these things have I kept from my youth up; what lack I yet? Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come and follow Me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions. — *Matt. 19, 16—22.*

The text just quoted connects with one of the most interesting and instructive incidents in our Lord's ministry. He was on His way from the province of Galilee to visit the city of Jerusalem. By reason of His majestic and powerful preaching and, above all, by reason of the performance of His mighty works His fame preceded Him. In consequence He was followed by a great multitude of people, some of whom had come that they might cavil at His

words; others, that they might receive for themselves or for their friends healing of body; but not a few, we may safely assume, that they might be instructed by the words of wisdom and truth that fell from His lips. Among these was the person upon whom the evangelist here fastens particular notice. We are informed that he was a young man; and if there is one hopeful period of life, it is youth, when the heart is still tender, the conscience impressionable, and habits not so fixed that to change them is as difficult as to change the Ethiopian's skin or the leopard's spots. He was high in social position, rich in worldly possessions, well gifted, and though yet young, he was a ruler among the Jews, probably a ruler of the Sanhedrin, the highest and most honorable council of his people. That he was earnest and sincere is manifest from the manner in which he made his approach; he came running and, regarding not the presence of the multitude nor affecting the dignity of high station, fell upon his knees and cried out: "Good Master, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" The Savior, it is said, beholding him, loved him. The deep interest he showed concerning the most momentous question that can engage a thinking mind, caused him to be drawn towards Him. Answering his question, He directed him to the Law, saying: "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments." The questioner, unwilling that anything should be left indefinite in a matter of such transcending importance, desired the Savior to be more explicit, to point out the specific requirements of the Law which were most necessary for him to observe. "Which?" he inquires. Our Lord mentions them: "Thou shalt do no murder; Thou shalt not commit adultery; Thou shalt not steal; Thou shalt not bear false witness; Honor thy father and thy mother; and, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." In reply the young man declared: "All these things have I kept from my youth up." He had been carefully attentive to the claims of the religion of his fathers; he had strictly conformed to the ceremonial observances in every detail. In consequence he regarded himself as perfectly up to the standard in every respect, a model religionist, beyond criticism and blame. And so, with no small degree of self-sufficiency, he cast up the question: "What lack I yet?" Is there anything more, Master, that I stand in need of? They tell us that extreme cases need extreme remedies; and so our Lord, who with His omniscient eye did not fail to discover the snare into which this young man had fallen, said to him: "Go and sell that thou hast"; make a sacrifice

of thy worldly possessions and thus show whether thy heart is right with regard to the First Commandment: "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me," and also with regard to the sum of the second table of the Law, which says: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." We must not misunderstand these words, we must not construe them to mean that every one who would enter into eternal life must go and sell his property and possessions. Our Lord, on this occasion, was dealing with an individual soul. He knew the peculiarities of this young man, that, clothed in self-righteousness and professing to worship and serve the living God, his heart was wrapped up in his riches; they had become the idol which he worshiped. And so He put him to the test at this point. This would decide what his religion was truly made of. And how did the young man measure up to the requirements put before him? Alas, my beloved, not even the possessions of that eternal life could induce him to relinquish the possessions of this earthly life. After all, his riches were his god; his heart was hopelessly and inseparably welded to the world. He did what thousands since have done and are still doing — "he went away sorrowful." Nor have we any account of his ever returning to Christ; over his subsequent history there hangs a dark, impenetrable cloud.

This text, therefore, suggests to us an important truth, a truth which perhaps more than at any time in the history of the Church needs emphasis and application. Here was a young man of excellent character; his morality was unimpeachable; he was scrupulous in observing the precepts of the Law. Do not our Christian communities abound in men of that very description and type: sober men, respectable men, honorable men, well-meaning men, when it comes to social, civic, and domestic life, exemplary men in their dealings, charitable in their efforts, honest in their transactions, so that they might serve as models for some church-people? You have met them; I have; men who, judged by the standard of the world, can throw out their chest and ask, "What lack I yet?" If any one has a show of favor with the Almighty, I have. And when you probe them, as our Lord probed this young man, when judging them by God's standard, you find they lack the most essential elements necessary to admit them into eternal life. Nor only for such is the application of our text; it has to do with us all. All of us are inclined to be unduly impressed with a sense of our self-sufficiency. Let us regard, then, the question of our text, "What lack I yet?"

1.

Three things do we find that this young man lacked. In the first place, he lacked a true and deep knowledge of God's Law. "Except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye can in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven," says our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount. At first hearing these words may seem strong. We know that the scribes and Pharisees were the most scrupulous and strict people in keeping the Law, yet according to His words there must have been something radically wrong about it, else He would not have spoken in this manner. Our Lord Himself tells us what it was. The scribes and Pharisees held, and with them this young ruler, that to perform the letter of God's Law was sufficient; as to its spirit and meaning, that was of little or no consequence. If they only abstained from the grosser outbursts of sin, there was no need of troubling themselves much about its secret motives and impulses; religion and righteousness with them meant strict observance of the external forms and acts, without concern about the principle and intention of them. And in the light of such an interpretation of God's Law they might vaunt and flaunt themselves in their own eyes, but their supposed righteousness could not avail with God; true righteousness must exceed that. The keeping of the commandments, according to correct interpretation, depends primarily upon the heart, upon the spirit in which all things are done, upon the intention which one has. An idolater is not only he who bows down before some image made of wood or stone, or who pays divine honors to mere creatures. Whosoever worships self or goods or mammon, or bestows his supreme regard on anything or anybody except the true and only God, sets up an idol and proves himself an idolater. That is what this young man did. And in this day's Gospel-lesson our Lord shows how not only he who in malice kills some fellow-being is a murderer; there may be no grasping of a dagger or some other means or instrument employed to destroy life; "whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer." No hand may be lifted, no blood may be shed, no life may be destroyed, and yet there is an inward anger, a malicious, spiteful feeling, the desire for revenge. These thoughts already fasten the charge of murderer upon us. Neither is he the only adulterer — coming to the Sixth Commandment — who has given his body over to lewd, sensual deeds. According to the true spirituality of the Law the impure thoughts that are harbored in your minds, the unchaste wish of

the heart, the sensual look that is cast by the eyes, are enough to fix the guilt of adultery upon you. And so there may be no unlawful taking and appropriating of anything belonging to another, and yet, to begrudge a man his property, to envy him his good fortune, secretly to covet what he has, to wish it were not his, and to be pleased to see him lose it, are elements of larceny; it is stealing in the soul. And so throughout. It is not so much the external act that determines our righteousness as the internal thought, whether embodied in outward deeds or not.

And now take the man who tells you he is not a drunkard, that he has not brutalized himself by intemperance and wallowed in the filth of the gutter, that he is no thief, no sensualist. It is all well. We congratulate such that they have risen above these debasing passions of our degenerate race; but how high does this bring them up to the requirements of God's spiritual Law? Where is he who can say, I have made my heart clean? I am pure from my sins? How all that self-righteousness tumbled, how the hopes of this self-confident moralist sank away when the Savior told him: "Go, sell that thou hast and give to the poor"! And so it is with every soul blind to its sinfulness and content with its own little goodness, honesty, and outward morality. These will never give us a passport to heaven. Here are the words of the Lord: "Except ye repent, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." There is no man who can obtain heaven by his own righteousness; for "we have all sinned and come short of the glory of God." "There is not a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not." This is one thing this young man lacked: an understanding of his own heart and the realization that "all our righteousnesses are but as filthy rags."

2.

And a second thing did that young man lack and do all lack whose case is covered by his, and that is a knowledge of God's plan of salvation. "What good thing," he asks, "must I do that I may have eternal life," Mark the form of that question. He thought that by doing some good thing he was able to win eternal life as the prize. Here was his mistake. It is not by the doing of any good thing or any number of good things that heaven and salvation is ours. "By grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast," is a clear and explicit declaration of the Word

of God. "Therefore," thus the apostle finishes his masterly argument in the letter to the Romans on this subject, "therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith, without the works of the Law." And in another passage, as though he would sum up the whole argument and present the conclusion in emphatic terms, as if he would silence all cavil and clear away all doubt, he declares that "without faith it is impossible to please God." Let us lift up this declaration into a little more prominence. Whatever a man may be or profess, whatever be his gentleness of manner, sweetness of disposition, integrity and honesty in business, or outward blamelessness of life, not one nor all of them can answer as a substitute for faith. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." Here is the indispensable and unmistakable condition upon which rests salvation. There is but one door of entrance into eternal life, and that is by faith in Jesus Christ, and all efforts to enter in by any other way are vain. That is the plain and simple doctrine of God's holy Book. That is God's plan of salvation.

'Tis not by works of righteousness
Which our own hands have done,
But we are saved by sovereign grace,
By faith in God's own Son.

What, then, shall we say of those who, brushing aside this element of faith, who trust in their moral virtue and good character, who rely upon their self-righteousness, whose religious motto is: "Do good and dread no one," and, looking about with a supercilious air, declare, "We are just as good as most professing Christians and church-members, perhaps even a little better." What shall we say to them? We are to tell them what the Savior said. When Nicodemus came to Him by night, seeking instruction in regard to his personal salvation, he did not fail, like the rich young ruler, to make a full confession of his case, how unimpeached he was, and what nice things he had done. What was the Lord's reply? Did our Savior say: "Nicodemus, you have done well; there is no reason why your conscience should be disquieted; return to your home, do as you have done, it will all work out splendidly"? Is this the language, are these the instructions of our Savior to eternity? Nothing like it; on the contrary, far from it. "Verily, verily, I say unto thee," He said, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." So would we come to him who is trusting in his moral virtue, his honesty, his benevolence,

or any other form of mere human excellence, and in the language and by the authority of the great Teacher we would say to him: You must be born again; prostrating yourself at the foot of the cross as a penitent sinner, you must accept Jesus Christ as your Redeemer; else salvation is out of the question.

And there is one more particular in which this young ruler was lacking; we shall touch upon it but lightly. Our Lord's direction to him was: "Go and sell that thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come and follow Me." But we are told that he went away sorrowful. When it came to casting his lot with the humble Rabbi of Nazareth, who went about having not a place where to lay His head; when he was asked to surrender his earthly possessions, he would have none of it, and so he passed out of sight.

My dear hearers, Christ's call is still the same to every one of us. The conditions of true discipleship have not changed. "Whosoever will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me." By learning to do His will, by confessing His name, by copying after His example, by espousing His cause, and devoutly joining ourselves to the community of His people, we follow Him. He that fails to do so or esteems anything too good to be given up for Christ's sake; who declines to perform any Christian duty because it conflicts with his worldly pursuits, cannot be a true disciple. Unreserved, unfaltering obedience to Christ's Word and commands is required, and, if circumstances demand, readiness to give up our dearest interests in order to follow Christ. And now look at so many who are outwardly so virtuous, honorable, and charitable; are they followers of Christ, confessors of His name, observers of His appointments and ordinances? Are they willing to sacrifice anything for Christ's sake and for the sake of His cause? Why is it that so many of that very sort are not members of Christ's true confessing Church? Have you ever considered it? that, with all their commendable traits and conduct, they follow the example of the young ruler in our text, turning their backs and fading out of sight?

May we have learned from this meditation that all righteousness outside of the righteousness of Jesus Christ, all human virtue, independent of faith in Christ Jesus, is insufficient for salvation and unavailing! Believing firmly on Him who is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life," let us walk in that Way that we may become partakers of eternal life. Amen.

Seventh Sunday after Trinity.

There came a man from Baal-shalisha and brought the man of God bread of the first-fruits, twenty loaves of barley and full ears of corn in the husks thereof. And he said, Give unto the people that they may eat. And his servitor said, What, should I set this before an hundred men? He said again, Give the people that they may eat; for thus saith the Lord, They shall eat and shall leave thereof. So he set it before them, and they did eat and left thereof, according to the word of the Lord.

2 Kings 4, 42—44.

The Gospel-lesson for to-day has been selected with exquisite fitness for this season. It is the time of nature's putting forth her bounty, the early harvest, and the Gospel-lesson asks, as it were, Who is it that has created all this and provided all this for the enjoyment and use of man? Is it not the selfsame divine Giver who so miraculously provided the multitude in the wilderness? Or is this annual occurrence, the fact that He clothes our fields with waving harvests and fills men's garners with rich supply, less an evidence of that almighty power and government without which not one seed would germinate and not one ear of corn ripen on its stalk? The only difference between the feeding of the four thousand on that memorable occasion and the provision of His creatures to-day is this, that the Lord there did in an extraordinary and exceptionally striking manner what He ordinarily does by a slow process and by the use of means. That slower process He describes when He says: "First the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear," and that full corn ground in mill and kneaded in dough and baked in loaves. And that use of means involves the application of our strength and diligence in industry. It is these God has given us, and it is these with which we can meet the usual necessities of life. Failure to do so, to sit down in negligence and ease, trusting that God will supply our needs in an extraordinary manner, by a miracle, as of old, would be not to trust Him, but to tempt Him. Even the heathen knew so much, that God helps those who help themselves. But when in spite of such diligence and forethought on our part our resources fail, we are not to lose sight of the vastness of God's resources. It is one of the most comforting promises given by the Almighty and sustained by experience that He will never permit those to starve in body who cleave to Him in soul. If we trust in the Lord, we shall verily be fed, says the psalmist. In His Sermon on the Mount the Lord directs us: "Behold the fowls of the air; for they

sow not, neither do they reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them." The world in its wisdom sneers at the idea that faith will supply the wants of the body, and many who do not belong to the world, but who have been chosen out of the world into Christ's kingdom and Church have very low conceptions of God's providence and ruling. The truth is that we are all of us, and the best of us, still dependent, frail, and helpless creatures; anxiety about health, about family, about property, about a hundred and one different things annoys our souls and disturbs our peace of mind. And yes, we are inclined to be drawn into schemes and connections of a questionable character to relieve this anxiety. Let every Christian be careful here; let him be fully persuaded in his mind and conscience that he is doing right, as one that must render account, before he undertakes anything. Rather than allowing this sense of dependence, frailty, helplessness, and anxiety to draw you away from God, let it tend to draw you nearer to Him, to look upward with a more relying and confident eye, to grasp with a steadier, childlike faith the arm of Him who has pledged His help to see us and ours through. That is one of the outstanding purposes of to-day's Gospel-lesson and also of the narrative of our text, namely, to strengthen the faith and encourage the hearts of God's people with respect to their maintenance, their physical support in this life. God grant attentive hearts and minds for a proper meditation of our Old Testament text.

1.

Famines were very frequent in Palestine in ancient times. One such occurred in the days of Elisha; for seven years it prevailed, and we can imagine what deep and wide-spread misery it occasioned, and how the people were reduced to the greatest of distress. Among those who were most grievously affected by the universal calamity were the students at the schools of the prophets, the colleges for the education of the ministry which were established in different places throughout the land, and which were almost entirely dependent upon charitable contributions. Yes, to such degrees of destitution were they reduced that their food consisted solely of wild herbs found in the wilderness. Toward the close of the famine, we read, a farmer came from Baal-shalisha to Gilgal with a present of the first-fruits of the harvest. God had blessed his labors with some small degree of success; the earth, after long and utter barrenness, yielded to him a scanty increase.

And in the gratitude of his heart he laid an offering of it before the Lord. It consisted, we are told, of twenty loaves of barley — barley being the staple product of the country — and of some full ears of corn. It was a small and altogether inadequate supply for the large company at the school; for we must not think of these loaves as being of the size of wheaten loaves, they were far smaller; indeed, it would require at least three of them to form a meal for a single person, so that, in all, the twenty loaves would have been inadequate for seven persons. We do not wonder, therefore, that Gehazi, the servant of the prophet, when directed by his master to set such an insignificant supply of food before so large a party of famishing men, exclaimed in tones of surprise: "What, should I set this before an hundred men?" When judged by the standard of sense and of sight, Elisha's servant was not alone in this. When Philip was asked to feed the five thousand in the wilderness with the five loaves of bread and the two small fishes, he hesitated skeptically: "What are these among so many?" Doubtless we would have acted likewise. Elisha, therefore, repeats his command, correcting the weakness of his servant's faith, and gives the reason and the assurance: "Give the people, that they may eat; for thus saith the Lord, They shall eat and shall leave thereof." It proved so. The servant set the limited portion before the people, and the hunger of all was satisfied; yea, they left behind some basketfuls of the fragments.

Now, who does not recognize this miracle at Gilgal to be a striking type of the miracle recorded in the Gospel-lesson? Most strikingly did these miracles attest the divinity of our Savior, that He was a Teacher come from God, the only One who, as He relieved the bodily, so He alone could relieve the soul's want of famishing and perishing man. And most strikingly did this miracle at Gilgal point in the same direction. It was a witness of that same divine power. It turned the thoughts of these men in a time and in a place which was given to the deadening and materializing influence of Baal-worship to Him who is the Origin and Source of all things, by whose word the world was created and by whose continuous work it is upheld.

The lesson, though we are not plagued with a famine, is as essential and timely now as then. We hear a great deal in these days of nature and nature's laws; little enough about nature's God. We have become exceedingly scientific; we glory in our marvelous agricultural and industrial achievements, quite to the ruling out

of His name and glory whose fear and knowledge is the beginning of true science, and upon whose blessing everything is resting, whose hand regulates it all, and without whose constant and gracious help science with all its advances could produce neither a grain of seed in the ground nor a drop of rain to fall from the skies. After all, there is no truth simpler and more cheering than when we confess in the words of our Catechism: "I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still preserves them." Never allow the materialism of this age to destroy or to veil your childlike faith in a superintending, overruling, all-pervading, and all-governing personal God. Nor, to come back to our narrative, overlook your obligation to Him.

2.

The act of the man of Baal-shalisha showed that he was a devout Israelite, an observer of the institutions of the Old Testament Church. It was a law that the first-fruits of the harvest belonged to the Lord. Nor was this only so among the Israelites. Among all the nations of antiquity it was customary to dedicate a representative part of the produce of the fields to the god of agriculture. Offerings of the wheat and corn were laid by the Greeks and Romans upon the altar of their idol Ceres, from which we have the word "cereals." These heathen felt that tokens of gratitude were due the god of nature. But with the Israelites there was linked with the placing of their first-fruits upon the altar a still deeper thought than mere acknowledgment; it signified that all who reaped and all who enjoyed the harvest were pledged to employ a portion of it in the service of God; not Baal or some other idol was to receive a portion. The strength and health imparted by eating the bread of Jehovah, the true God, was not to be employed in the worship of idols or for any purpose dishonoring the Lord. It was because this grand and simple principle was often not recognized by the Israelites that the harvest so frequently failed in Palestine and famines were so long and grievous. By breaking and depriving His people of the staff of life, bread, He wanted to punish them for their idolatry, prove to them that their harvests were His direct blessing, bestowed only on condition of their obedience to His will, and thus lead them to repentance and bring them back to the service and worship of Him who gives rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling men's

mouths with food and their hearts with gladness. Time and country have not changed this religious principle. Our harvests, notwithstanding our vastly improved methods of agriculture, depend as much upon the religious character of our people as did the harvests of Israel in the long-ago centuries of Elisha. God is still the same, human nature is still the same, and there is no difference in the growth of the corn. The harvest-fields show God's relation to His people, and it is well that we should, in our appreciation and our use of God's blessings, show the state of our hearts toward Him. The manner may differ. Very few of those here present raise their own food. Wheat and corn are not grown in the streets of our city; its inhabitants are occupied in other pursuits necessary for the well-being and advancement of mankind. Yet the principle is the same. Our support comes from God; therefore a representative proportion of our temporal goods belongs to God, and the whole ought to be employed in a manner honoring Him. What a gift of piety and love, of noble devotion and consecration, was the offering brought by the man in our text! It was made the means of a miracle, it proved a blessing to God and to others. Nor does the giving from our means to the Lord's cause prove otherwise now. Put it down as a divine law, a principle everywhere sustained, that there is an inseparable connection between what we receive and how we employ that which we receive to carry out His good and gracious ends in the Church and in the world. Had the farmer from Baal-shalisha kept his barley loaves to himself, they would have furnished him with seven meals, his family perhaps with one. Giving them to the Lord, they were made the means of an abundant feast for many; he received a spiritual blessing from the act, to say nothing of the material blessing which God, no doubt, gave him, and his memory has been handed down with honor and perpetually maintained throughout the Old and New Testaments. Let us heed and imitate his example. May we be impressed, from this miracle at Gilgal, with this duty and its blessedness!

3.

And to emphasize one other outstanding element in this account, even as it is also brought out in the Gospel-lesson, I would mention the economy that was displayed. It is instructive that our Lord, who had at His command all the possessions of the universe, who could multiply the smallest amount to the largest extent, and who, on other occasions, insisted that we ought not to

be anxious about what we shall eat and drink, but trust in that Good Providence which feeds the ravens and clothes the lilies of the field, should have insisted on gathering up the fragments. And so here at Gilgal: "Never mind," Elisha might have said to Gehazi, "never mind about the crumbs, the odds and ends: there is more where this came from. Leave the remnants to the beasts and the birds, or let them go to waste." Not so. We are reading much about the conservation of food. It is no new topic. It dates back thousands of years. God's Book is full of it, even as He is the greatest and wisest practitioner of conservation. There is not a thing in all His universe that is ever thrown away, wasted, squandered, lost. Read the holy records. It puts to shame the prodigality, extravagance, self-indulgence, luxury, the pampering of the body and the feeding of the lusts of the eyes and the flesh which has become so common with us. Not as if God did not permit His people to have some innocent pleasures, comforts, and conveniences, but, withal, there must be the exercise of thoughtfulness, frugality, economy, and prudence. A Christian is careful to gather the fragments that remain in an unselfish, sagacious spirit, and where this is done, and thus done, He vouchsafes us that we shall never be in need.

God grant that we may so use this earthly bread which feeds our body that we ever connect it with that good and gracious Savior who supplies us not only with material food, but with bread that perisheth not, even with Himself, as He says: "I am the living Bread, which came down from heaven. If any man eat of this Bread, he shall live forever." Amen.

Eighth Sunday after Trinity.

Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines; for it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace. — *Heb. 13, 9.*

The subject introduced to our attention in our text, it might be well to remark at the outset, is not a popular one; quite the opposite; plain speaking about false doctrine is very unpopular. The prevalent opinion is that it matters not so much what doctrines are believed or disbelieved; we ought to acknowledge all classes of religionists as brethren, whether their belief agrees with ours or not. The Savior — to quote His words from the Gospel-lesson for this day — seems to have been of a different opinion. His command is:

"Beware of false prophets"; He commands us to be careful as to the doctrines to which we give place and attention. His apostles, too, shared His precautions; for thus they wrote: "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit." "Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God." And no faithful pastor, unless he be a sleeping shepherd, can fail occasionally to call attention to this subject. It is not without cause that St. Paul says: "If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ." And the same pertains to the membership. For people to think lightly in matters of doctrine, to be indifferent as to the purity of their faith, is the same as if sheep were to consent to have companionship with wolves; it is like opening the doors of your house for thieves. Let us, then, attend to the warning issued in the text, noting —

1. The danger warned against; *2. The safeguards.*

1.

It might at first sight create surprise that the apostle in his day already should have written these words when those divinely inspired teachers were still living upon earth. Yet nothing is more certain than that the ministry of iniquity, as St. Paul calls it, was already at work before the apostles were dead. "Even now already," says St. John, "there are many antichrists." The truth is that the infernal enemy of God and man has no more subtle device for ruining souls and stopping the Gospel of Christ than false doctrine. Outside of the Church he is ever persuading men to break down the worship of God by grossest idolatry and insubordination, and inside the Church his favorite device is to sow heresies, propagate errors, and poison the fountain of God's Word by his insidious corruptions. Was it not so in the earliest days of Christianity, when we see the Church rent asunder by strife over the doctrines of the Holy Trinity and the person of Christ? How was it in the Middle Ages, when false doctrine had so completely overspread the Church that the truth as it is in Christ was well-nigh buried or drowned, when Popes and cardinals, archbishops and bishops, priests, monks and nuns, with few rare exceptions, were steeped in ignorance and superstition? Again, no sooner was the Reformation introduced than false prophets immediately arose and marred the work which the Reformer began. And in our day and under our very eyes it is false doctrine which is eating out the

heart of the Church of Christ. Alas, "divers and strange doctrines," as the apostle here calls them, are as common as weeds in a swamp, and as luxuriant too. By the pen and by the tongue, by the press and by the pulpit, the country is deluged with a flood of erroneous opinions. Here is one class of false prophets which speaks lightly of the inspiration of the Bible, sneering at the very idea of a supernatural revelation. There is another class of false prophets that would filter down the atonement, the all-sufficient sacrifice, of Jesus Christ, leaving Him to be but a Pattern and Example; yea, they deny outright that there is such a thing as an eternity. There is still another class which sets up the cry: Away with all the old, worn-out clothes and methods of Christianity, with your bondage of creeds and churches and systems! Give free scope and play to a modernized interpretation as you have it in such keys as *Science and Health* by Mrs. Mary Baker Eddy. And over all of these is heard the voice of that Church which claims to be the Church that is one, true, and holy, within whose pales the conscience finds relief within the confessionals, virgin worship, the doctrine of a purgatory, prayers for the dead, etc. No observant eye but can detect that there is in our times a general tendency toward free thought, which shows itself in believing novelties of the wildest and most monstrous character and stigmatizes as uncharitable and narrow-minded for any one to say of any one doctrine, "This is true," and of another, "This is false." And there are several features which help to make this matter of our consideration peculiarly dangerous. One is that emphasized by our Savior when He directs us to beware of such as approach us in sheep's clothing. False doctrine does not meet men face to face and endeavor openly to turn us away from the truth as it is in Jesus. It approaches us secretly. How earnest, apparently, and zealous are the teachers and upholders of a false doctrine. We think, for instance, of the propaganda of the so-called Russellites in our day. It is marvelous with what assiduity and cost they have sought to spread their views. But since when is zeal and sincerity and fervor a proof of true doctrine? Saul, no doubt, was in great earnest when he persecuted the early Christians, yet it constituted him a murderer. The founders of the Spanish Inquisition in the Middle Ages and after were in dead earnest, and by torturing and burning God's saints they thought they were doing God service; yet they were actually persecuting Christ's members and walking in the steps of Cain. Beware of being carried away by this delu-

sion, that, if a man is in earnest, his religion is good; this is only another way of saying, Let him alone, he is all right. Earnestness is in itself an excellent thing, but it must be earnestness in behalf of God's whole truth, or else it is worth nothing at all.

Another popular present-day contention whenever it comes to the subject under consideration is, Why this ugly contention? Let us have peace and unity. What good does it do to be so intolerant? Contention everywhere, and most of all in religion, is a hateful thing. It is hard enough to fight the devil, the world, and the flesh without fussing and fighting with those who may still be arrayed on Christ's side. And very worthy is this plea of our careful examination. The Christian is always a man of peace; he wants harmony, good fellowship, unity, and union. Take the man who wrote this text. No one knew the value of peace and unity better than he. It was he who wrote that sublime chapter, the 13th of First Corinthians, on love. It was he who said: "Be of the same mind one toward another"; "Be at peace among yourselves"; "The servant of God must not strive." Yet he whose writings thus abound with admonitions to kindness, directs us, like his Master in the Gospel-lesson for to-day, to "mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them." Now, why did he so write and say, man of peace and love and unity that he was? Because he dreaded false doctrines, because he knew that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump, because he would teach us that we ought to fear the loss of truth more than the loss of peace. Unity without the Gospel is a worthless union. There is a hatred which is the purest love — the hatred of erroneous doctrines. There is an intolerance which is praiseworthy according to the Scriptures — the intolerance of false teachings in the pulpit. If men come among us who do not preach all the counsel of God, who do not preach of Christ, and of sin, and of holiness, and of ruin, and of redemption, and of regeneration, and, at that, in a Scriptural way, we ought to act upon the injunction given by the Holy Ghost in the Old Testament: "Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge," and to give evidence of the same spirit shown by the apostle when he wrote to the Galatians: "Though we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached, let him be accursed." For the truth's sake our Lord Jesus Christ denounced the Pharisees, saying eight times over in the 23d chapter of Matthew: "Woe unto you,

scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" And who shall dare to breathe a suspicion that our Lord was wrong?

For the truth's sake Athanasius stood out against the world to maintain the pure doctrine regarding the divinity of Christ, waging a controversy with the great majority of the professing Church in his day; and who shall dare to say he was wrong? For the truth's sake Luther broke connections with the Church in which he was born and denounced the Pope and all his ways; and who shall dare to say he was wrong? We should no more tolerate false doctrine than we would tolerate sin. Controversy or no controversy, peace or no peace, one thing we must maintain: Christ's truth, Gospel purity. A sorry day when we can bear to hear Bible-teachings mangled or adulterated and can sit in our pews while sham Christianity is being poured into our ears, all for the sake of peace. Let us never be ensnared by this specious plea. Let us remember the words of our Lord Jesus: "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth; I come not to send peace, but a sword." Never let us become guilty of sacrificing any portion of God's Word upon the altar of peace. Rather have things turbulent than to have them smooth and pleasant at the expense of truth. — Let this suffice in respect to the first particular, the danger pointed out.

2.

As to the second division, the safeguards, if we would be kept from being "carried about by divers and strange doctrines," we must, in the first place, have a thorough knowledge of God's Word. Ignorance of the Bible is the root of error. Knowledge of the Bible is its great preventive. That blessed Book has been given us for the very purpose of being a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our paths. Would you know what is the truth? Would you be established amid the war of words which you hear on every side about religion? Take down your Bible; let it be taken down diligently, patiently, and systematically. A man must know his Bible well if he is to prove religion by it. In a hurrying age such as we live in it is only too apparent that many Christians do not give time enough to private reading of the Scriptures. The consequence is that they are "carried away by divers and strange doctrines," falling an easy prey to the first clever teacher of error who brings them under his influence. Remember this command and take heed to your ways. Familiarize yourself with the great leading texts of the Bible; let them become as a "sword of the

Spirit" in your hand, which, as our Lord did when He was tempted by Satan, you can effectively use against error. The greatest danger to a Church is a laity and, for all of that, a clergy, ignorant of the Scriptures. Let a man neglect his Bible, and what prevents him from becoming a victim and advocate of the false doctrines which happen to meet and appeal to him? He lacks the line by which to take their measure, the test by which to discover the lurking poison. Hence, let us arm our minds with a thorough knowledge of God's Word.

Again, as a faithful pastor, as one who loves your souls, I warn you to be very careful as to the preaching you hear and the place of worship you attend. Such is the simplicity of many Christians reared within the sound of the pure Gospel that, entering into another place of worship, they expect to hear nothing but heresy from beginning to end. To their amazement and joy they may hear an eloquent and charming sermon, containing a vast amount of truth and only a few homeopathic drops of error. Then a reaction takes place. They become inclined to think their former religious teachers illiterate, uncharitable, harsh, and their confidence in them is shaken, perhaps forever; — I could mention such by name; — it ends with an entire perversion and enrolment in their ranks. Like counterfeit coin it is not stamped "bad"; it passes current from the very likeness it bears to the truth. Can anything be more flagrant in this respect than Christian Science, which employs words that are in the Scriptures, to which, however, they attach an entirely different meaning? And even if it be just a little different, such practise is dangerous. A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. It is the omission or addition of one little item in the doctor's prescription that spoils the whole medicine or turns it into poison. We do not tolerate a little dishonesty or a little cheating or a little lying; just so in religion. He that would be safe, let him take good heed as to where he worships. It is a dangerous thing to play with fire; and it is inevitable that, when you touch filth, you will be soiled.

Finally, let us be ready at all times to contend for the faith of Christ, for the pure Bible doctrine. Not as if, like Goliath of old, we should go up and down saying, Give me a man to fight with! Always feeding on controversy is poor work indeed. But we must never be ashamed to testify and to stand up boldly for what we know is God's truth. And with this ought to go the fervent prayer that God would bless our testimony. Nothing is

impossible. The Apostle Paul was once a persecuting Pharisee, Luther was once an unenlightened monk, and if we are true to the Bible and unhesitatingly and firmly and prayerfully stand by it, it cannot but have blessed results. Let us ponder well, to our souls' profit, the exhortation in the text.

Let me be Thine forever,
Thou faithful God and Lord,
Let me forsake Thee never
Nor wander from Thy Word.
Lord, do not let me waver,
But give me steadfastness,
And for such grace forever
Thy holy name I'll bless.

Amen.

Ninth Sunday after Trinity.

His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant! Thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy lord. — *Matt. 25, 21.*

Christianity, the religion of Jesus Christ, is not a religion of works, but of grace and faith. Says the apostle: "By grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast." And yet, while Christianity is not a religion of works, it is not a religion without works; for "faith," declares the Bible, "if it hath not works, is dead." And the work which Christ's religion places upon us is twofold. There is inner and there is outer work. "Work out your own salvation," directs the Bible. Accordingly, it is for us to work out what God works within us. Without Him we can do nothing; with Him, with the strength which He imparts, we can and we must do all things. There is sin to be resisted, temptation to overcome, self to be conquered, affliction to be borne with patience; we are directed to grow in Christian knowledge, in Christian virtue, character, and conduct. Plenty to do, inwardly and also outwardly. And this, we may add, constitutes the first, or primary, duty — self-development, building up our inner life, spiritual culture. The membership of a church ought above all else to be soundly indoctrinated, well instructed in God's Word, spiritual, bent on adorning the faith they profess with a holy, consistent character and conduct, conformed in spirit and life to

the spirit and life of Christ. The very first and most necessary work, we repeat, is the work within us.

The person who joins the Church with the intention of doing nothing has come into the wrong place. The Bible speaks of the kingdom of heaven under the figure of a vineyard; it represents our Lord as calling laborers into His vineyard, and we read of those bearing the burden and heat of the day; and the Epistle-lesson for to-day, with inspiring tones, exhorts us to run, to fight, to put forth every energy, and to bend every nerve and sinew that we may obtain; all of which expresses activity, exertion, effort. The same thoughts are embodied in the parable from which our text is taken; let this engage our attention. The incidents of the Parable of the Talents, as it is called, you are familiar with. It represents our Lord as a distinguished proprietor, traveling into a far country, and committing into the hands of his servants a certain amount of capital — talents. With these they are to operate, do business, — "occupy" is the word, — "till I come." After a season he returns and holds account and passes different judgments. The two principal thoughts which we would regard under the sanctifying influence of God are: —

1. The trust committed to the stewards;
2. The reckoning and reward that follows.

1.

Departing to a far country, *i. e.*, returning to heaven, whence He came, the blessed Master gave to His servants a sum of money. In our parable we read of the lord who traveled into a far country. "Unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey." To each and all of us have been committed some peculiar gifts, or talents. Not a single one in the whole family of God's creatures but has been invested with the goods of heaven. There is the possession of a strong and healthy body, a robust and strong constitution, which can do and endure; what a splendid, precious talent that is! There is the endowment of mental capacities, a bright, wide-awake intellect, a mind that can reason well, speak well, write well, an acquaintance so much thought of that we speak of such a one as talented, possessing a precious talent. Then again, property, possessions, money, and means. "We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out," says the Bible. So, then, what we have must be a talent from God,

entrusted to our management for a time. The same may be said of our influence. Influence, whether personal, social, or civil, is a talent, a power, an important element in life, given by God for an important purpose. And thus we might add one after the other, the various natural, moral, and spiritual goods; and these have been committed by the almighty Giver to the children of men. However, He does not give to all alike. The master of the parable gave every man according to his several ability. Some have a large capital, five talents, others only two or one. Some move in an influential, lofty sphere, others in a humble, lowly one. The kingdom of heaven, *i. e.*, the Church, of which to-day's parable speaks, is made up of vessels holding large and small quantities. There was only one St. Paul, one Augustine, one Luther, one Walther. Neither does the Lord expect the same from all alike. He does not expect the lowly, unlettered Christians to fight like the champions of the faith. He does not expect from poverty the means it has not to give, nor from the person of delicate constitution the active energies of the giant. Let none needlessly mourn that they cannot glorify God by talents He never gave them. Let none say: "Had I been in another position in life, had I had the means, what would I not have been and done!" The thing to do is to thank God for your limited talent and pray Him for grace to use it rightly. It is not for the brook to say: "I need not flow because I am not a river," nor for the grass not to grow because it is not an oak. We cannot do without the stars because the sun and moon shine in so much greater glory. In the army not all can be generals and officers; indeed, of what use could the general be without the rank and file of soldiery? And so let us not murmur because we are persons of small capacity, because we have only two or even only one talent; and let us not deceive ourselves as to what we would do if we had five or ten talents. What we ought to strive to do is to use to the best advantage the goods entrusted to us; and when do we do so in the situation in which Providence has placed us, and in the circumstances surrounding us?

The talents committed to the servants in our parable were not absolute gifts. They were a trust. The very name "servant" involves that idea. It is so with our talents. When parents give their children capital, they do not want them to waste it, bury it, or throw it away in idle prodigality, but to invest it and give a good account of it to the credit and joy of all concerned. Is it any different with our divine Parent? We are His children, His

servants. We became so by grace. In the Second Article we confess, in words as clear as they are beautiful, of our Lord and Savior: "He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death." Why? "That I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, even as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true." Health and strength are not my own; my mental endowments are not my own. Anything, whatsoever I have or you, or what we have attained to and gained, are not ours, but from first to last His, whose we are and whom we have pledged to serve. Do we feel that? It is the first idea that enters into a proper use of our talents. It is the abc of a consecrated Christian life and service, *viz.*, that all we have and all we are is a loan from Him and must, in order to be rightly and profitably used, be employed for Him, His purposes, and His glory. We are only the stewards, the custodians, of the great Master's goods, no matter what our situation, calling, or occupation. Blessed the man, the woman, that has come to a realization, a consciousness, of this! Life then takes a different course. Remarked a woman to me the other day, "Life is not worth living." It all depends upon what you are living for. St. Paul says: "For me to live is Christ." Yours is a profitable existence if you live for Him who shed His blood for you.

2.

But to come to a more direct application of my subject. I feel that we do not, for the most part, have a lively sense of our stewardship, of what we owe to the Lord in respect to our talents, that a large proportion of the members of our Church have no adequate sense of the Scriptural requirements of Christian service, have never awoke to a proper consciousness of their personal responsibility as professed disciples of Christ. There are multitudes in our churches whose power for good is dormant; who call themselves servants of Christ, but are always on the invalid or excused list, passive, standing idle at the market-place. They have never yet looked around them sufficiently to ask the question, "Have I any power that I can use for Christ?" and have therefore never attempted to use this power, these gifts. Beloved, it is surprising, even as it is sad, to go over the names and to see how many

one would have to mark with a minus sign, who, as negative factors, constitute the drones in the hive of our church life. Not as if the Church expected huge things, but she has a right to expect some things; for God has given her members those talents for that very purpose. What talents?

In preparing this discourse, I sought, as a representative and minister of my Master, to take an inventory, as it is called in business, of the stock in trade, and without seeking to flatter or make comparisons, it is surprising to learn how rich we are in resources, with what fine talents God has gifted us, how vast are our possibilities for usefulness. In this inventory I find many that have had a splendid religious bringing up, parents who were godly and consistent, and whose education from Bible and Catechism was habitually and soundly imparted. I find among our membership men of the highest class of professional ability, in the medical world, in the commercial world, skilled mechanics, employees of the Government, men of good education, of intelligence, of social influence. I also find among our membership the fine talent of Christian womanhood, with all which that stands for — love, devotion, constancy, moral purity, consecration. I find there the talent of money. Judging from the liberality of our members according to the report distributed last Sunday, what a mighty power to do the Lord's work! And lest I grow tedious with the enumeration, I find there is the talent of song and music, of attractive social qualities, of ability to teach, to visit, to plan, and to do -- the greatest conceivable variety of individual gifts. Truly, we are blessed in this composition of our membership. And what has all this been mentioned for? For the same purpose that the Lord Jesus related His parable — to stir up your conscience to the right use of your talents.

To take the servant mentioned last in the text first: "But he that received one went and digged in the earth and hid his lord's money." Note, this servant had not wasted his lord's goods like the unjust steward in another parable, nor had he spent them in carousals and other sins like the prodigal son. Nothing of that sort. The money was all there, every cent, entire and undamaged. Only one thing is charged against him: he had not used his talent, he had made no profitable use of it, had won no gain. He tries to explain and justify himself. But to no avail; to all his explanations and framing of excuses his lord answered and said: "Thou wicked and slothful servant!" and the sentence goes forth

against him. "Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." A sad and sorry fate was his.

Beloved, one almost shrinks to make the application. Is that not the trouble with hundreds and thousands of otherwise good people, who regard Christ and His Church with reverence? Though they are called Christians and wish to be given due credit for their religious standing, yet, if you ask them for the use of their talent, a little activity, energy, liberality, self-denial, which may be rightfully expected from them, what explanations! They do not like to make themselves conspicuous; they have their fears about their capacity; they dread the responsibility; they do not wish to appear too religious; and if urged persistently, they are apt to become quite irritable and resentful. They are by no means inactive and indolent in other respects. They give freely for other purposes and diligently work for themselves, though they have all they need, for friends who will never thank them for it, for greedy heirs, who would be better off without it, for municipal, commercial, and other societies; but when it comes to matters of religion, the interests of the soul, the glory of the Savior, and the maintenance and perpetuation of the only cause that can reform and save, they have no heart for it; they count their money to the very last cent, and hang back with the flimsiest of excuses. This is the present-day mode of burying one's talent. No wonder such people regard the Master as a hard man, and all exhortations such as we are now making undesirable and unwelcome.

However, this is but one view of the reckoning. There is another, immeasurably more pleasant. "Well done, thou good and faithful servant," is the repeated commendation, the approving sentence, of the master in the case of the other two who were entrusted with talents. Here we will observe one thing in particular.

It was not so much the gains they had acquired, the splendid success they had had in duplicating and increasing their allotted talents. He praises their faithfulness. Thank God for that. How discouraged and depressed we might otherwise often be! How many a minister has sunk broken-hearted into the tomb because he felt his labors had so little result! How many a missionary has returned home after years of self-sacrificing toil, with health ruined and energies prostrated, from a field that seemed to yield no fruit! Many a member, too, has grown disheartened when with good

intentions, zealous effort, and unselfish, kindly spirit he has met with discouragements, misrepresentations, even rebuffs and ridicule. Let such heed the sentence and utterance of the master in the parable. It is not "Well done, thou good and successful servant," but, "Thou good and faithful servant."

Success is one thing and a most acceptable thing. In the estimate of the world it is the main thing; for nothing succeeds like success. In the estimate of God, faithfulness is a superior quality and the main thing. Up, then, and doing! is the message of to-day's instruction. Let none of us bury the talents or talent with which we have been entrusted. As you sang a while ago: —

If you cannot speak like angels,
If you cannot preach like Paul,
You can tell the love of Jesus,
You can say He died for all.

If you cannot rouse the wicked
With the Judgment's dread alarms,
You can lead the little children
To the Savior's waiting arms.

Let none hear you idly saying,
"There is nothing I can do,"
While the souls of men are dying,
And the Master calls for you.

The time we have, the opportunities we have, the means we have, little or much, the influence we have, the gifts of intellect, education, the power we have from God in prayer, all our energies, strength, life itself, let us lay it all on the altar and use it earnestly for the Lord, so that, when life's short day is past, and we stand before the tribunal, ours may be the sentence, more than a thousandfold recompense for all the little we can and have rendered: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant! Thou hast been faithful over a few things; I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." God help us all by His grace to stir up and utilize for Christ whatever gift there may be in us! Amen.

Tenth Sunday after Trinity.

How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation? Which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord and was confirmed unto us by them that heard Him. — *Heb. 2, 3.*

To overstep God's Law means to invite God's punishment. It is so in every particular. Let a person transgress the laws of his physical constitution by overeating or overdrinking, or in his

work or pleasure trench on the hours needed for sleep, and nature will vindicate the wrong in enfeebled health, shattered nerves, and aching head. Or if men violate the moral laws, the laws which define their duties to their fellow-men; if they steal, lie, commit adultery or murder, they become subject to the retribution which God and society have laid down in vindication. And again, let a person trample on the laws of his religious or spiritual nature, not acknowledge, reverence, and love God, but, instead, follow the imagination of his own thoughts and the promptings of his flesh and the world, and there will be correspondingly evil consequences. No one has ever, or can ever, violate the laws under which the Creator has placed man without experiencing the evil consequences of so doing. Nor is it necessary that it should be open and deliberate violation, a positive breach of such laws. To neglect to obey God's command, simply to omit in some way what He has bidden us to do, may be equally as disastrous as positively and flagrantly to disobey it.

Let the farmer neglect to plow his land and sow his seed in spring, and the effect will be the same as if hail had devastated his fields and insects eaten his crops. The man of business need not be a forger or gambler, a prodigal or a sport; he need not commit fraud or falsehood to ruin his business. Neglecting it will be sufficient to accomplish such ruin. The noblest ship that steams the waters, let her commanding officers neglect to direct her course, and she will be dashed to destruction. Neglect, omission, is as productive of evil as commission.

To-day's Gospel-lesson shows us our Savior weeping; we hear Him pronouncing words of doom and punishment upon the Holy City. Why? What was the cause of those tears, the reason of that destructive sentence? "Because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation." And our text asks the question: "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" Let us heed in our devotion this morning, for our example and warning,

The Danger of Neglecting God's Salvation.

Let us note,

1. How this neglect shows itself; 2. What it leads to.

1.

If ever there was a city highly favored, it was the capital city of God's ancient people, Jerusalem the Beautiful, famous for situation, the joy of the whole land. There stood the Temple with the

Ark of the Covenant and the tables of the Law; there Heaven imparted the sublimest revelations, from a Moses and a Samuel down to Isaiah and Malachi. The noblest Messenger had labored and testified among its inhabitants, instructing and guiding them in the way of righteousness. In times past God had visited them in the fullest stretch of His mercies, and at the time of the Gospel-text He had especially and grandly visited them. The Son of the Highest had taken upon Him the seed of Abraham, filled their land with mighty wonders, preached the Gospel of grace such as never man spake, and stood ready to lay down His spotless life for them that they might have salvation. And how did they behave through it all? We have already heard. They knew not the time of their visitation, they neglected the day of their salvation, and in the end threw up against the whole matter a stiff-necked perverseness, a don't-care wilfulness, which found its vent in the murderous cry: "His blood be on us and on our children!" And it *did* come upon them. History knows of nothing more "bloody." The destruction of Jerusalem, as told by one of their own historians, Josephus, beggars description, so gruesome and dreadful was it. And the fact that these ancient people of Israel are still wandering over the earth as fugitives and vagabonds, scattered among all nations, a byword and a taunt, despised, persecuted, stamps the judgment of God upon their brows forever. "Now, all these things," declares the apostle, "happened unto them for ensamples, and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come."

Ours, no less than theirs, are great privileges. The teachings of Moses and the prophets, supplemented by those of the evangelists and apostles, the cream of all divine revelations and dispensations, are ours. The question of the Lord, speaking through the prophet, comes to our mind: "What could have been done more to My vineyard that I have not done in it?"

He found our fathers lost and perishing savages, shocking the world with their barbarities, given to idolatry and vices, benighted hordes, who came down as an avalanche from its mountain, burying the civilization of the earth in ruins. But God in His mercy chose them out to hear the word of His salvation. He broke down the hedges of heathenism about them. He sent forth His messengers to set up the stake of Christianity beside them. He caused the sun of His Gospel to shed its pure, bright beams; He sent the gentle showers of His grace and the winds of His Holy Spirit to

move and purify and sanctify men's hearts; and thus has He established a Church among us and for us. Consider, my beloved, what the apostle here deems "so great salvation." Not in some heathen land have you been placed, some dismal territory of Mohammedanism, Brahmanism, Buddhism, but in the garden spot of Christianity, Protestant Christianity, and of that the truest, purest form on earth, Lutheran Protestantism, is your birthright and inheritance. Schools, churches, Bibles, a Christian ministry, Christian preachers, printing-presses and books, and every facility for moral, intellectual, social, and religious growth and prosperity are about us.

It is indeed as the text says: "so great salvation" — great in the love, the condescension, and grace of God which provided it; great in the price at which it was purchased, being none other than the precious blood of Jesus Christ; great in the blessedness which it gives for time and eternity. That is the situation. The wagons of God are waiting at our doors; the ships of salvation lie anchored at our docks. But why, my dear hearers, are so many still without God and without hope in this world, living careless, aimless, reckless, profitless lives in the sight of their Creator and Savior? Says the text: "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" It does not say despise it, openly and wantonly oppose it, utter mean words and throw up rebellion against it, but "neglect" it. Yet, what is the difference?

A medicine is brought to me. I am told that it is one that never was known to fail. If I treat it with contempt, fling it untasted upon the ground, it will do me no good. And just as little good will it do me if, looking at the medicine and approving of its ingredients, I let it lie unopened and untasted or take so little of it that it fails to do its proper work. 'Tis so with God's salvation. Time would fail to mention the various ways in which it is neglected. A few reflections may suffice. There is nothing more interesting to a minister when absent from his charge than to observe how conditions are elsewhere religiously, and so, going to the place where God's people are wont to meet on the Lord's day, he regards that as a fair standard of their devotion; for the commandment of the Lord reads: "Thou shalt sanctify the holy-day." "Remember the Sabbath-day to keep it holy." How great his disappointment! How vacant the pews! Where are the worshipers? He goes out for recreation in the afternoon — he secures the answer. Boats thronged with excursionists, parks teeming with multitudes,

fishing, yachting, automobiling, given to all possible diversion and amusement, to everything, in short, but the consideration of holy thought and reverence for God's holy commandment; and this, be it marked, is the conduct of those (what have we to do with the children of this world?), I say, the conduct of those who profess to be the children of God, and who would be seriously offended if you placed them anywhere but among the best in the church. But why criticize those afar off? Is there not plenty occasion at home? Yet, is this not "neglecting so great salvation," and that in the face of a positive, plain, unalterable command?

Again, the minister recreating for a few weeks, leisurely and informally engages people with whom he is acquainted in conversation; opinions are offered on topics of all sorts — marriage, business dealings, Christian Science, lodgism. He is glad to hear that there is still to be found in some, Christian principle, Christian conscience, Christian simplicity, and love of the truth. Yet withal, how vague are the prevalent opinions on most subjects; they betray a sore lack of the simplest doctrines of the Catechism, and that Bible-reading and study has fallen into sad collapse. Where once, in the days of our youth, we found positiveness, certainty, clear-cut decision for Christ and His Church, we behold wavering and yielding to the inroads of worldliness. Nor is this confined to society abroad; perhaps it can be found among ourselves also. In families once staunch and solid, influences within and from without have, like the constant washing of the waves against the shore, frittered away the former positiveness. Things occur which the parents would have regarded with indignation and horror. And if, to come to our subject, one investigates the cause, what is it? There has been — not contempt, no, — not an opposition, no, — but a neglect of God's salvation, of religion. Money-getting ambition, worldly indulgences, seeking unchurchly companionship, dropping the time-honored customs of family worship and table-prayer, the Christian church-paper, these things have gone on insidiously, gradually, and after years come the effects, and so what seemed wrong once seems wrong no more, and what was once upheld as certainty has become uncertain.

2.

These, as stated, are a few reflections which will explain what is meant by not despising, rejecting, not "neglecting so great salvation." And to what does it lead? It has already, in a measure, been indicated. Of Jerusalem it is said she knew not the time of

her visitation. She forfeited her opportunity, lost the day of her salvation; never did such grand occasion ever present itself again. It is so in every life, whether of a nation or of an individual. Each has its day, its time and favors. God visits a nation when His fear is in the land, His honor upheld, His laws respected, His day sanctified, when righteousness, morality, and sobriety prevail. There are times when God draws nigh unto us as He does at no other time. The message of grace does not at all times come home with power to the heart; there are some states and stages more favorable than others, which, if neglected and wasted, will never return. Let us be wise, then, and if conditions favor, by reason of dwelling in a Christian community, with easy access to a Christian ministry, opportunities of "knowing the truth as it is in Christ Jesus," let us not put them away by excuses and, like Jerusalem, fail to know the time of our visitation, but diligently attend to the things which make for our peace.

Again, experience shows that to neglect salvation eventually enfeebles our capacity for receiving salvation. From a cave that I once had occasion to visit I saw taken a number of small fish which were totally blind. Failing to use their eyes, they had lost the power of seeing. The same thing does it come to with those who do not open their hearts to the things of God, who take no interest in the salvation He offers; their souls shrink, their capacity for salvation dries up, and deadness settles upon them. Even the little that interested them before fades away; they become morally and religiously insensible. A more deplorable condition cannot be imagined. Yet this is the condition of many. The truth is that no divine visitation leaves us as it found us; it always leaves us better or worse. You cannot come in contact with truth or grace and put it off without being poorer, weaker, worse off than before. You cannot have God's Word, and the Sacraments, open church-doors, a good ministry, without having deeper convictions of sin, greater love for your Redeemer, a higher conception of life, duty, destiny, and truth. If you have not had this effect, but on the contrary, neglected God's gracious offers and invitations, it will make you less attentive than before, and you will gradually sink into a state of spiritual insensibility, where you will feel neither the need nor the desire to be saved.

And the end of it all? "How shall we escape?" How can we escape? Turn your back upon the life-boat, and you will justly sink. Refuse the only medicine, and you will deservedly perish.

As surely as God is a holy God and a God of truth, He will certainly fulfil His threatenings and discharge His vengeance upon those who neglect this "great salvation." Yes, how shall we escape after all the gracious invitations we have received and faithful warnings we have heard? Let us flee for refuge to the only source of salvation, which the Son of God by His holy, precious blood and innocent suffering and death has obtained for us and commanded to be preached in all the world. And let us guard against neglect of it. Let us diligently attend to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. Amen.

Eleventh Sunday after Trinity.

Because thou sayest, I am rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing, and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked, I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire that thou mayest be rich, and white raiment that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve that thou mayest see. — *Rev. 3, 17. 18.*

Man, my beloved, is very liable to be deceived, and unfortunately he is as liable to deceive himself as he is to be deceived by others. People are constantly deceiving themselves as to their personal attractions, their mental powers, the honor and credit to which they think themselves entitled, and what concerns us more immediately, they just as readily deceive and impose upon themselves with regard to their spiritual estate and moral qualities. A very marked instance of this we have in the Gospel-lesson for the day. The Pharisees were the cream, as men thought, the brightest exponents and representatives of the Jewish religion; no class of people could have been more strict, externally pious, and conscientious in the observance of the Law. What this man in the Gospel-story tells of himself, when, throwing out his chest, he recounts his virtues and informs God of all his good traits: "God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican; I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess," was true. In matters of worship, fasting, prayer, scrupulous conforming to the Hebrew faith, the Pharisees were without fault and flaw. And yet, judging by the verdict of the Lord, of Him whose eyes discern the heart of man, there must have been something radically at fault; with all their good thinking of themselves they were the dupes of self-deception;

for thus our Lord declared: "I tell you, this man [meaning the publican] went down to his house justified rather than the other." A case of self-deception.

Another instance, on parallel lines, is quoted in the case of the congregation of Laodicea, when in this third chapter of Revelation, in words which the Lord Jesus Himself spoke from heaven to His Apostle John, it reads: "Because thou sayest, I am rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing, and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked, I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire that thou mayest be rich, and white raiment that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear, and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve that thou mayest see."

Let us this morning look at the state of the Laodicean church and listen to the good and wise counsel which the Lord gave her.

1.

"Thou sayest, I am rich and increased with goods." Bible-students have spent much time over the question whether the riches in this case mean material or spiritual riches. No doubt both. Laodicea was a rich city in Asia Minor. Many of the products of the East there changed hands for distribution toward the West, leaving rich profits for the merchants and manufacturers. There is reason to believe that the church there was the wealthiest in earthly goods of any then existing, and where there is great wealth, there is likely to be a great deal of self-confidence. It is wonderful to observe how a few thousand dollars and a corresponding social position tend to exalt, magnify, and improve people in their own eyes; with what firmer step and loftier *hauteur* it inspires them; and churches having a number of such members easily persuade themselves that they have everything necessary to meet all possible purposes. But the principal stress of description falls upon spiritual matters (for they could scarcely have grossly deceived themselves to suppose that they were rich and increased with worldly goods, if really poor in that respect). They considered themselves rich in grace, well off in respect to their Christianity, supplied with all that was necessary to give them good standing and favor in the sight of Heaven. They had enjoyed, at that time, in all likelihood, were enjoying, the ministry of some of the ablest servants of God, had done many deeds of kindness and charity to the sister congregations; they themselves, without question, erected a mag-

nificent house of worship and considered themselves up to the ideal of a standard congregation. What lacked they yet? Nothing — "and have need of nothing." Such was the fancied state of this congregation. And the real condition? It was like that of a patient who goes to a physician and is examined by him. The good man examines the chest, listens attentively with instruments to sounds that unpractised ears cannot discover, and perceives that the man is afflicted with some heart or lung disease of which he himself and his family are completely ignorant. He thought perhaps it was some trifling ailment; he expected to be well in a day or two and be able to pursue his usual business. He does not know the dangerous state of the case, the lurking danger within. So spiritually. It is not what we think we are, nor what others think and say that we are; — for that may be ignorance, malice, or flattery on their part; — we are what the heavenly Physician and Examiner sees us to be. Those people in Laodicea thought they were rich; He says they were poor and miserable. They doted on their prosperity; Christ speaks of their wretchedness and misery. They were satisfied with their keenness of sight; Christ says they were blind and naked.

But how, we question, was it possible for them to entertain such false conclusions and be so miserably deceived? The clue to that is furnished us in the preceding verse, where the Savior says: "I know that thou art neither cold nor hot; I would thou wert cold or hot." In other words, the type of Christianity which these people exhibited was of the lukewarm order, and of all states in which a person may be living it is the worst. A man who says positively and point blank that he cares nothing for religion, pays no attention to it, lives as if it were nothing but fable, priestcraft, and superstition, and stands aloof from the church and all Christian associations and obligations, is "cold." And whatever may be the Lord's estimate of such a one, present and future, he is not deceiving himself and others with vain hopes and expectations. He is "cold" and counts himself outside of the Church. It is different, however, with a lukewarm person. If he is not a Christian, what is he? Does he not possess a baptismal and confirmation certificate? When has he ever withdrawn his hand to give to a noble purpose? Does he not occasionally go to Holy Communion? They do not believe in all this new-fangled religion; the old church and its doctrines are good enough for them; they believe in having their children baptized and confirmed, and if in

the light of all this they are not Christians, what would you rate them to be? And yet, here rests the very danger; were people hot, they would look deeper. They would not content themselves with the possession of a baptismal and confirmation certificate; they would not cultivate just enough religion to keep them easy in conscience, yet not enough to keep them uneasy and anxious about their salvation. They occasionally visit the house of worship, conforming to certain features. Theirs is only an outward church-membership. These are the plasters of a half-hearted, self-satisfied, lukewarm Christianity, all the more deceiving because in our day so prevalent.

2.

Now here, in His address to this Laodicean church, the heavenly Physician draws away the bandage and with all faithfulness and sincerity tells them how to rid themselves of this miserable type of self-delusion. His words are pointed and plain: "I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire that thou mayest be rich, and white raiment that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear, and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve that thou mayest see." The articles mentioned are such as these Laodiceans were accustomed to handle; they were large dealers in ointments, perfumeries, and salves, highly valued for their healing virtues, and so the Lord purposes to furnish them with a salve to cure their distorted vision, to correct their eyesight to a right understanding of their soul condition and wants. What is this wondrous, supernatural eye-salve which, if spread over the eyelids, removes the films from our eyes and gives sight and light? That, according to the words of our text, is the anointing which is from above, in other words, the teaching and the work of the blessed Spirit; and the first work of the Spirit of God upon the heart is a conviction of our entire worthlessness and utter depravity, and that in the sight of God we are wretched and miserable. It was this conviction the Laodiceans lacked; it was this conviction the Pharisee in to-day's Gospel lacked. Yet it is this conviction that lies at the foundation of all religion. Unless there is a prostration of the soul before that high and holy God, a deep sense of guilt and wretchedness and brokenness of heart, a lowering of self-complacency, there is no cordial reception of grace and salvation. All men, indeed, admit that they are sinners; that is a concession which is cheerfully and thoughtlessly made. And yet, at bottom, in the secret part of his mind and heart, man is a self-righteous

being, not at all as bad, he thinks, as the Law of God and the description in the Bible would make him. He has passions and infirmities, it is true, but he has also a good heart, and it is not fair or likely that Almighty God should call him to task for weaknesses and foibles, inseparable from erring humanity. If he is not as good as he should be, there are many much worse than he. Look at the habitual drunkard, the miserable prostitutes who prowl through our streets, the souls dead to every moral feeling, who merit nothing but hopeless perdition. But I am different. My very feelings are shocked by the comparison, and there is a difference in the degrees of depravity. And yet, let it be noted that human nature in its departure from God and holiness is the same in all. The common taint, the same poison, of human depravity has contaminated and polluted every heart. Listen to the Lord's declaration: "They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one." Whoever receives the testimony of God upon this subject must form the inevitable, though humiliating, conclusion that human nature, instead of being a bright and dignified thing, with strong propensities to moral excellencies, is what the Savior here calls it, a thing "wretched, miserable, poor, and blind," and that this is not the case merely with a few notorious delinquents, who have been exposed, as they say, to strong temptations and placed in circumstances peculiarly impervious to moral and religious improvement, but that, whatever distinctions may exist among us, arising from education, from social and religious privileges, in point of depravity and ruin there is none. "The heart of man," of every man, "is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked." And no one who has ever examined that heart of his, who has ever looked into the Law of God and its requirements, but yields to the correctness of the divine statement. However amiable and respectable you may appear in the private circle and in public life, when you step into the light of God's countenance and judge yourself there, there is only one pertinent feeling and becoming attitude, and that is that of the publican in the parable, who "would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me, a sinner," the sinner, the chief of sinners. But it is only when the Spirit spreads this eye-salve over our darkened eyelids that the cataract of ignorance and self-righteousness is removed, and that we see in its real true colors our spiritual condition before God, *viz.*, that we are nothing but poor miserable

sinners; it is only then that the Pharisee disappears. Oh, for a thick and frequent application of that celestial eye-salve!

The Lord adds in His further counsel: "Buy of Me . . . white raiment that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear." This was another article for which the town of these Laodiceans was famous. They were large traders in garments; the wool of Laodicea especially was famous throughout the world. Alluding to this fact, the Savior counsels them to buy raiment from Him. What can that mean, spiritually regarded? My beloved, it is most significant, though commonly regarded a rather trivial occurrence, that, when our first parents in the Garden of Eden had fallen into sin, having taken of the forbidden fruit, "the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked." They sought an expedient of their own to cover their nakedness. The Bible says: "They sewed fig-leaves together and made themselves aprons." But the Lord God rejected this manner of apparel, as it was not regarded proper by Him, and then substituted another. For thus we read: "Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins and clothed them." And as with our original parents, so ever after with their offspring. It is, spiritually considered, the tendency of the sinner, when he has come to a sense of his guilt, when he recognizes that he is "naked" in the sight of God, to cover up that nakedness with an expedient of his own; he would furnish his own garment to cover his nakedness, such as penances, pilgrimages, fastings, saying of prayers, the performance of good works. What are these but man's device by which he expects justification and salvation, acceptance with God? It was so with the Pharisee in the Temple. How self-satisfied he rehearses his virtues and good deeds in the ears of the Almighty! What for? If God would not accept such a one as he, a man of such integrity, excellent in character and life, whom would and could He accept? And yet, the Lord Jesus tears the fig-leaves from off this type of religion when He declares: "This man," the publican, "went down to his house justified," accepted. The other, the Pharisee, was rejected because — here is the fundamental doctrine of our Christian religion — "by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified." You cannot cover your spiritual nakedness by any clothing of your own texture and fabric. There is only one garment that will avail, the material of which was brought down from the Plains of Heaven, and which was woven on Mount Calvary by the divine Sufferer, and that is the white

garment of Christ's righteousness. Clad in that, the sinner has wherewith to stand in the sight of Heaven: —

Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling.
Naked, come to Thee for dress;
Helpless, look to Thee for grace.

Nothing else will avail. Buy that raiment, "that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear."

And again: "I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire." What is this gold tried in the fire? That is quickly said — faith. Gold is the most precious of metals; so faith is the most precious of all graces. It is by faith that the soul is saved; we are justified by faith. Without faith it is impossible to please God. Gold is indestructible; when put in the hottest furnace, it suffers no injury. And so true faith in the heart of a child of God endures and conquers; the fire of temptation, of affliction, and persecution cannot destroy it in the soul. Secure that, counsels the Savior in the text, from Me, and you will be secure.

We have this morning regarded the fundamental doctrine of our holy religion — salvation by faith, without the deeds of the Law. The Lord preserve us from the self-deception of the Pharisee and of the Laodiceans and open our eyes that we may see the real wretchedness of our souls and accept, in sincere and childlike faith, the remedy furnished for us by the Cross. This is Christianity, this is salvation. Amen.

Twelfth Sunday after Trinity.

And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord nor faint when thou art rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth. — *Heb. 12, 5. 6.*

One of the most mysterious chapters in life, one of its darkest and most perplexing problems, is the chapter and problem of human suffering. How full is the world of it! "Man," declares the holy writer, "is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upwards." Who is a stranger to it? Where is the person who has never felt physical agony, whose body has never been visited by disease, and whose frame has never been pierced by the arrow of pain? Some may have been more fortunate than others, but none have been entirely exempt, and there is no telling what may befall any of us before

we lay aside this mortal coil. And why is it sent us? In all lands and ages, among all classes, from the savage to the philosopher, we find the human race has ever busied itself with trying to harmonize the existence of pain and disease with the care and love of an all-governing Providence.

Our age, in particular, an age very impatient of sickness in every shape and form, has developed strange opinions in regard to this matter. Thus we have among us a class of would-be religionists, who decked themselves with the finest of names, Christian, headed by one Mrs. Mary Baker Eddy, who contended that sickness is a delusion, a mere nothing; to quote her own words: "Fever, cancer, consumption, pain, deafness, are only delusion, a mere belief of mortal mind." When, in the history of our human race, has there ever been held such an unreasonable and unscriptural conception? Denying the existence of sickness is like denying that blood courses through our veins, or that nails are growing at the tips of our fingers; yea, worse, it would be denying the inspired Word of God, which everywhere records the fact of sickness and disease. We can only marvel how some who have been informed of better things should ever have fallen a prey to such unnatural, unreasonable, and unbiblical twaddle! It confirms the statement of the apostle: "Because they received not the love of the truth, for this cause God shall send them strong delusion that they should believe a lie." Again, others hold that sickness and suffering is an evil, and an evil only; that it is a mark of God's displeasure. The person must have done something, committed some sin or sins which have brought upon him such affliction. How frequently does the lamentation reach the pastor's ear, What have I done that God should thus deal with me? Yea, if there is one place where the best of Christians is tempted to step upon atheistic ground and to murmur, a place where the afflicted spirit is apt to question and wonder what evil has been done that God should visit with such chastisement those who are most anxious to serve Him, it is here. God's allotments and ways seem strange and surprising; it makes them suspect that, after all, there is some mistake. Favor me, then, with your attention, both those who are pining under some affliction and also those who are still in health, that, when their time comes, as it assuredly will, they may know how to regard this matter. Nor is it irrelevant to call to our minds the experience of a year ago when, to speak in the language of the psalmist, "by reason of the pestilence that walketh in darkness, . . . a thousand

fell at our side and ten thousand at our right hand." (Influenza.) Let us, in line with our text, regard —

The Advantages or Blessings of Sickness.

1. In respect to ourselves, 2. In our relation to others, 3. In our relation to God.

1.

"And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children. . . . For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth." Strange assertion! We should have supposed that, when the Lord would show His love, He would say: "Whom the Lord loveth He maketh rich, great, illustrious; He giveth them all that this world has to bestow." But He does not say so, and the whole history of His dealings with men in the Bible and in the Church shows that He does not do so. Some of the greatest saints have been the greatest sufferers, and the pathway of Christianity from its earliest days is marked by persecution, affliction, and martyrdom. "Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated"; yet Esau was the prosperous man, Jacob afflicted. Joseph did God love, and yet Joseph did God visit. Lazarus did God love, and the rich man did God cast off; yet the rich man was clothed with purple and fine linen, and he fared sumptuously every day, and poor Lazarus mingled with the dogs, who licked his sores. So that is absolutely no sign of God's disfavor, outward sickness and adversity, but, on the contrary, there is in such experience a stronger ground for the assertion that he who suffers belongs to those whom God loves.

And here it is well to make a most important distinction, *viz.*, that life's afflictions are twofold: they are sent for punishment, and they are sent for paternal correction. As long as a man is a stranger to the Gospel, not a Christian, he has no reason to think that his afflictions are anything but a punishment; but when a person becomes a Christian, he has reasons to believe that his afflictions are only corrections. Why? Because Christ has borne all our punishment. "There is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." Jesus has atoned for all our sins and for the punishment of all our sins. God in heaven is a loving Father, and so it is for us to argue thus: God is my Father, and therefore my affliction is fatherly, sent to me in love. Not thus: My affliction is bitter, and therefore God is a wrathful being; He is punishing me for my sins. God does not punish His Christians, — He has punished His Son instead, — but He corrects

them, disciplines them, chastens them. All the trials of God's children are paternal, the expression of love. Let us once and for all grasp that vital truth; for that is the tree cast into the bitterest stream of life's afflictions, which will make that stream sweet and beneficial to our souls.

And what would God effect with these His corrections sent in love? One design, told by the apostle in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, chap. 11, 32, is: "We are chastened of the Lord that we should not be condemned with the world." We are prone to love this world to excess. We spoke of that in particular on the last Lord's day. Our hearts, too, as Christians, are easily led to become entangled with the vanities, pleasures, and preferences of this earth. The reason why God at times snatches that lovely infant from a mother's bosom is that that mother fixed on her child the affection she owed to God, who gave it. The reason why the means which we possess at times take unexpected leave and fly away or come under the grasp of the robber is that God would not allow you to rivet your affections to things that are perishable. And so with sickness. Nor is there any time when a person feels more how little, yea, nothing, gold and silver can do for you, — that it cannot assuage the burnings of the fever which searches you, nor mitigate the pains which oppress you, much less refresh, uphold your spirit, ready to fly to the judgment-seat of God, — than when he is prostrated on his bed of dangerous sickness. How illusive, valueless, are then all earthly objects!

This leads to another reflection: "Nearer, my God, to Thee, e'en though it be a cross that leadeth me," is a sentiment as true as it is familiar and beautiful. There is nothing more beneficial, nothing that can make us feel more deeply the infinite importance of religion and the preciousness of Jesus Christ to prepare us for that future world than an occasional cross. In the hurry of an active life, amidst the manifold occupations, we are easily turned aside from fixing our souls on the things which are not seen and begin to grow indifferent. But when disease lays us down on the bed of infirmity, or some disorder causes us anxiety, it makes us halt and harvest our bodily forces, and we feel that we are not the powerful, active, venturous persons we once were; that our efforts are limited; and with it comes thoughtfulness; that indifference, wandering, and coldness is checked and changed, so that he pays attention to godly things, the worth of the soul is apprehended, and prayer assumes a vital place in the program of daily

life. We learn the beauty and consolatory power and preciousness of the Bible. Prayer is felt to be an indispensable exercise and power. We fell that Christ is all in all to us, and that this world is not our rest. Dr. Luther was wont to say that his three great teachers were prayer, study, and trial. Trial is necessary to the development of the Christian. "We must," that is God's method of enlarging, developing, His people, "we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." It is thus that the divine Sculptor chisels the statue of a Christian character. And to this chiseling process belong "sickness and suffering." No wonder that, in the light of such reflections, the apostle declares: "Despise not thou the chastening of the Lord." Find not fault with them and in impatience question His graciousness and love in sending them, but in all lowliness confess: "Whatever God ordains is good, His loving thought attends me; No poisoned draught the cup can be That my Physician sends me, But medicine due; For God is true. Of doubt, then, I'll divest me And on His goodness rest me." (Hymn 507, v. 3.) And oh, what a valuable lesson have we learned in Christ's school if we have learned that! It is a lesson that affords unspeakable peace and happiness in life's afflictions.

2.

Nor only that. The salutary effects of suffering, if rightly regarded, appear also toward others. For once, it makes us feel more tenderly for those who are similarly afflicted. To sympathize with others we must somehow have been under the cross ourselves. As the apostle says: "He causes us to suffer that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God." The most comforting of David's psalms were pressed out of him by sorrow. If Paul had not had his "thorn in the flesh," which, in all probability, was some kind of annoying or painful physical affliction, we would have missed much of that tenderness which quivers in so many of his letters. Are not the choicest of our hymns those which have been composed in times of suffering? So we, too, become more compassionate, kind, considerate, if we ourselves have passed through painful personal experience, and, we may add, more useful. Usefulness is not a thing which one can command at will. It is, in most cases, the result of discipline through which a person has passed, of life's experience. Thus the secret of a pastor's success, the power of his sermons and of his dealings with his people, is

not merely the theological training imparted at the theological seminary, necessary as that is, but the history behind the sermon, the experience out of which it was born. And so with every Christian. The helpfulness which he is to Christ and His Church, the conviction and faithfulness with which he deals with things, is determined more by his life's experience than by anything else. And so, if our trials and sufferings are costly, they are nevertheless well worth the cost; if we benefit ourselves, and they make us more useful in God's kingdom and to others, let us not think lightly of them.

3.

Finally, the Lord chastens those whom He loves in order to glorify Himself. Sick-beds are often more eloquent than the most brilliant discourses. You will pardon the personal reference. I called yesterday to see a brother in the ministry. He was once a powerful, energetic workman in the service of the Lord. To-day he is nearly blind, more helpless than an infant, a complete physical wreck, the sight of whom touches the deepest chord of sympathy. And yet, I confess that I was more benefited by my visit than he. What patience amidst bodily infirmity and pain! Calm, tranquil, and rejoicing, he said with composure: "The cup that our Father has given us to drink, shall we not drink it?" Such spectacles prove that there is a mighty reality in the Christian religion. When we see such joy on a sick-bed, contentment in distress, acquiescence in bereavement, we cannot but admit that there is something in such a faith. The religion that can make a man thus cheerful, even triumphant, is God's religion, and God is thus glorified.

Let us, then, to conclude, mysterious as is the affliction of sickness, seek to read it aright. Let us avoid atheistic ground, depression of spirit, questioning of God's love and righteousness. The design of our holy religion is the salvation of the soul. Everything that tends to produce this effect is a blessing, regardless of the form in which it may appear. Let, therefore, the afflictions which God sends us tend to produce this blessing, and let us bow ourselves under them to our welfare, the benefit of our fellow-men, and the glory of God, until we shall arrive there where "the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick," and where "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away." Rev. 21, 4. Amen.

Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity.

Blessed are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy. — *Matt. 5, 7.*

One of the most remarkable characteristics that distinguish man from the lower animals, the brute creation, is the trait mentioned in our text, namely, sympathy, mercifulness. Not as if animals had no feelings, strong feelings at that. What more, for instance, could any human mother do than the hen, which, observing the hawk in the sky, calls her brood and with a courage foreign to her usual nature faces the danger and covers her chicks with her wings; or the shaggy bear, which, placing her cubs behind her, confronts the hunters and offers her bosom to their spears? But though God has endowed the brute creatures with feeling, they have no sympathy. The fat and pampered dog will growl at, and drive away, the lean and houseless cur. The cattle of the fields desist not in their grazing because one of their number is suffering with pain or even dying.

A distinguishing characteristic, then, of man is sympathy, mercifulness. And yet, what is with him a natural impulse and disposition, that, by reason of man's selfishness, may be, and largely is, perverted and turned into hard-heartedness. Thus the Old World, the world before Christ, was a cruel world, a world in which the poor were crushed, in which little children were ruthlessly exposed and left to die, in which slaves were treated with unspeakable pitilessness, in which the chief amusement of the people was the bloody sport of the amphitheater, where men were hacked and butchered and put to death to make a Roman holiday. The grace of "mercy" found no place in their list of virtues. And how is it with the modern, present-day generation? We hear a great deal of the brotherhood of man; yet what forces are there at work engendering distrust, injustice, hatred, discord! What selfishness, suspicion, and industrial strife are playing their villainous parts just now, usurping the seat of power in the hearts of individuals and in the relations of men! With a materialstic conception of life seeking dominancy these days, with our land becoming more and more money-mad and pleasure-bent, how can it be otherwise than as our Lord has foretold, that "the love of many shall wax cold"? So it is timely that in the quiet of our sanctuary, seated before God, we, as His children, should consider once again from His holy Word what is required of us. Three particulars in this respect would we consider: —

1. What is mercifulness? 2. How is it exercised? 3. What are its blessings?

1.

The Gospel-lesson for to-day treats of the Good Samaritan. Who was the Good Samaritan in the highest and noblest sense? None other than the Lord Himself. He was mercy incarnate. It was "mercy" that brought Him down from the bosom of the Father into a world full of sorrow and sin and pain. It was "mercy" that prompted His life of service and beneficence. On nearly every page of the gospels we read statements like these: "Jesus was filled with compassion." The streets of the villages and towns through which He passed became like open-air hospitals filled with the lame, the palsied, the devil-possessed, the deaf and dumb, the blind, and other sufferers, all waiting for His pitiful heart and His omnipotent hand to heal them; for none ever appealed to Him in vain. And His entire life was summed up by His Apostle Peter in the sentence: "He went about doing good." Now, it is this pitiful and loving Savior who, after telling the story of the Good Samaritan, concludes it with the direction: "Go and do thou likewise." Nor is there a true follower of His who fails to do so. The Christian life has two sides, an inward and outward, or, if you choose, a contemplative and a practical side. On its inward side it is a life of fellowship and communion with God; hearing His Word and using His Sacraments; prayer and meditation; the cultivation of his soul. On the outward side the Christian life is a life of beneficence, manifesting itself in acts of kindness and helpfulness. These two aspects of the Christian life, inward piety and outward activity, are absolutely necessary to one another. Just as the root, if it has life in itself, will soon give proof of its vitality by the flower that springs from it, so, if there is the root of real religion in the heart, it will inevitably find expression in doing kindness to the needy and the helpless; even as, on the other hand, as history shows, there is no love to man, works of pity, and kind service toward the distressed and destitute where there is not the love of Christ in the heart; that has ever been, and still is, the source and spring of the world's beneficence. We cannot too strongly emphasize this. True love to man there is only where there is true love to God. We have all, to use an illustration, passed through some great manufacturing plant. On all sides were immense machines, doing their work with tremendous energy and deafening noise. Then our guide took us

to another room, quite a small room, perhaps the smallest in the whole establishment, where an engine was quietly working away. "This," said he, "is the power-room." From that little room issued the force that drove those various clattering machines in the shops adjoining. This world is full of benevolent, philanthropic agencies, hospitals, orphanages, refuges, institutions, homes; a thousand and one are the organizations at work about us. The energy that drives this multifarious machinery all comes from a little power-room — the heart filled with the love of Him who is the Good Samaritan, and who has taught us to befriend the poor, visit the sick, comfort the sad, uplift the fallen, and save the lost. In a word, answering the question, What is mercifulness? we shall have to say: It is a Christian virtue, born with Him in Bethlehem and nurtured with the blood-stains on Calvary. It is the Christian man and woman that is "merciful."

2.

And how, in what way or ways, does this mercy show itself? Mercy shows itself not necessarily in giving money. It does that, of course, too. In our day charity is done mostly through organizations, which build homes and institutions that must be maintained; and the method of so doing is largely by gifts of money. Among the purposes for which a Christian uses his income and means, for which he always has a dollar and a dime, is that of mercy. No legitimate and urgent appeal from the various channels in which charity moves among us but strikes a strong chord in our hearts and meets with a ready response of our hand. It was the custom of the early Christians to lay a weekly offering every Lord's day upon the altar for the relief of the needy, and they sometimes gave away large estates to supply the wants of the destitute, found hospitals, and perform other charitable acts.

Still, not only in this wise. There is many a person possessed of sufficient means and yet in need of mercy. Alas for the lonely, the fallen, the broken-hearted, the men and the women languishing for lack of love and pity, who yearn for a kind, cheering, uplifting, sympathizing word. Here stands the widow with her dark veil, the mother grieving over the loss of her little one, dearer to her than the apple of her eye. Yes, who can begin to mention the brows that are furrowed with disappointment and care, the hearts worrying with agony and woe! What do they need? Something more precious than coins of silver and gold can ever buy: kindness, sympathy, a word of cheer, a hearty shake of the hand. Ah, for

the wine of strengthening and the oil of sympathetic regard poured into the wounds of mind and of soul of so many who live in the same street with you, in the house next to yours, who need a merciful Christian friend and adviser, an expression of fellow-feeling and condoling concern. Learn, my dear fellow-Christians, in the midst of an uncharitable, selfish world to exercise this type of mercy. It is a glorious exercise of good Samaritanism. And, to add a few words of further instruction, it is told of the Roman Emperor Titus that he considered every day lost in which he did not do some good to some one. Let that be a resolve with ourselves. We may not be able to do good on a great scale, to become philanthropists, but all of us can daily do some good: a sick neighbor given a friendly visit; a poor soul that has wandered from the right path given a little word of advice and warning; a friend cheered by a kind letter; two people at enmity reconciled with each other, so that they become friends again; a family near you which never attends church given a cordial invitation; some simple office willingly assumed to aid the pastor in his work, which is also yours; easy, simple ways to do good in the power of the most average person to perform. It is not necessary to do things on a large scale, so as to win admiration and become a hero. But as a celebrated physician wrote out, as a prescription for a morbid patient, "Do something each day for somebody," so let us in a humble and quiet spirit, in God's strength and in imitation of our Lord's example, "do likewise." Begin this very day.

Now, a caution — do not grow weary. There are unworthy, abominable, ungrateful people. Our sympathy may at times be ill rewarded, and our acts of benevolence seem like so much water spilled upon the ground. That is disheartening; yet must we not permit such unfavorable experience to dry up the fountain of our mercy. If charity often fails, so do other things. Marriage does, education does, the pulpit does; but what person would refrain from marriage, what parent think of abandoning the education of his children, and what preacher think of giving up his pulpit because his sermons do no good to some? Christians are answerable for duty, not for results. And, moreover, let us never forget that more concerned than about the objects of our charity, for whom we give, is the motive of our charity, why we give, for Christ's sake, who in love gave Himself for us, and to whom in love we desire to give and do something in return. Nor shall we ever fail of the reward. That is the third particular of our sermon.

3.

"Blessed," reads the text, "are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy." No man bestows a benevolence upon another without the sensation in his own heart of satisfaction and delight. As England's greatest poet has so beautifully expressed it: Mercy is twice blessed; it blesses him that gives and him that takes. Next to peace and happiness in God there is no higher happiness on earth than that experienced in making others happy. There is no place and sphere in which we appear so gracious as when we relieve the world's suffering and wretchedness. There is a feeling of joy in our hearts compared with which the best pleasures of this earth are flat and unprofitable. The great sin of the world is that of selfishness, which, like a poison, corrodes men's hearts. To be pitied is the man whose horizon of existence is bounded by the narrow line of his own individuality, and whose heart, like his coffin, is just long enough and just broad enough to hold himself, with room for no one else; who has never felt the luxury and joy of having done a good turn to his neighbor, raised up a friend who was in distress, spoken a word of truth to the fallen or of comfort to a mourner, who gives not to the maintenance of the works of benevolence. Mercy has its own reward — peace, happiness, and heavenliness.

But our Lord here promises a special blessing to the merciful. "Blessed are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy." Cold-hearted and selfish as the world itself may be, it has respect and honor for a truly merciful man, and when he himself is overtaken by reverses, they are more likely to aid him than one who has been thoughtful only about himself. Moreover, experience shows how rarely charitable persons have been destitute. Does not our Lord say: "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." Yea, blessed are the merciful, blessed in their name, blessed in their family, blessed in their estate, blessed as far as this world is concerned, and blessed also in their relation to the world to come. There is a scene in the gospels of Judgment Day. To one group of men, those on Christ's left hand, the eternal Judge utters the dread words: "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." Who are these men, we ask, doomed to this terrible woe? They are the unmerciful. What was their offense? This, that in a world

full of sick and poor and distressed, they had shown no pity, no sympathy, no kindness. "Inasmuch as ye did it *not* to one of the least of these, ye did it not to Me." Then, addressing those on His right hand, the King says: "Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Who are these? They are the merciful. What caused them to be so highly commended? Just this, that in a world full of sorrow and misery they had ministered to the afflicted and in so doing had ministered to the King Himself. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me." Not as if there were anything meritorious for their salvation in this mercifulness. Mercy does not act and do in order to merit, but from a much different and nobler motive, being rooted in the faith and love of God; yet, so doing and acting, it shall not fail of the merit of which we have heard.

My dear hearers, are you merciful? A more vital doctrine than that which has engaged our attention this morning could not have been pressed upon a Christian congregation. As children of a merciful God, disciples of a merciful Savior, and under the influence of a merciful Spirit, let us resolve to pass through life brightening the path we tread, easing the minds, cheering the hearts, and helping our suffering brethren and fellow-men. To quote the language of another: —

Do all the good you can,
By all the means you can,
In all the ways you can,
In all the places you can,
At all the times you can,
To all the people you can,
As long as ever you can,

that yours may be the Savior's gracious welcome: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant! . . . Enter thou into the joy," the blessedness, "of thy Lord." Amen.

Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity.

Many of them also which used curious arts, brought their books together and burned them before all men; and they counted the price of them and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. — *Acts 19, 19.*

In the course of his missionary journeys the Apostle Paul had come to the city of Ephesus, the capital of the Roman province of Asia and one of the chief commercial centers. The great center of attraction in the city, in a religious way, was the temple of the

goddess Diana, a magnificent structure of huge dimensions, which it took 220 years to build, and which was justly accounted one of the wonders of the world. Inside of the temple, the object of greatest veneration and worship, was enshrined a likeness, or figure, of the goddess, which, it was believed, had fallen down from heaven and had been deposited there. One feature of this Diana worship was the use of what were called the "Ephesian Writings." On the crown, the girdle, and the feet of the idol were engraven certain mysterious symbols. These symbols, when pronounced, were regarded as charms; when written upon scrolls, they were supposed to have the power of protecting from evil spirits and of insuring success in any undertaking in which their owner happened to be engaged. Thus it was said that Croesus, reputed the richest man, on his dying day received immunity from pain by having these protectives burned on the funeral pile. The Ephesians themselves said that they had won thirteen victories in succession by virtue of these letters, and a celebrated wrestler is quoted as having always thrown his antagonist until he lost the scroll which before had been his charm. It was natural that a literature should grow up in connection with such mysterious and wonderful characters, that books, both numerous and costly, should be compiled and eagerly studied. Such was the origin of the "Ephesian Writings."

Now, with this dark, wide-spread system of magic and sorcery the Apostle Paul, of necessity, came into conflict as soon as he began to preach the Gospel within the walls of the city. God also armed him with special power for the purpose. The historian tells us that from Paul's body were brought unto the sick, handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them. Particularly one incident produced a deep impression. The sorcerers of Ephesus at first regarded Paul simply as a brother of their own craft, and so Sceva, a Jewish exorcist, and his seven sons, thinking the name of Jesus to be a spell like that used by themselves, tried it on an evil spirit with the words: "We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth." The result of their attempt was what might have been anticipated. The object of their incantations, so far from being relieved of his distressing malady, turned furiously upon them in the midst of their operations and drove them out of the house with blows and curses, and they barely had time to escape with their lives. The occurrence produced a great sensation; it conveyed the impression which was desired — that in Jesus Christ was the real

help, the real power, the real guidance, the real protection, which they had been seeking by means of amulets and charms, magical scrolls, mystic rites, and other illegitimate modes of communication with the unseen world, which men in all ages have practised, and which were especially rife in Ephesus. In consequence, the places of Christian worship were thronged, and believers were daily added to the Church. Nor only that; it appears that even in the bosom of the Christian Church itself there were some who secretly adhered to the practise of magical arts. These persons were so influenced by the wave of spiritual feeling passing over the city that they came and confessed and, together with some of the magicians and sorcerers themselves, did what was long remembered in Ephesus: in some public place, in full view of all the citizens, they made what we should call a "bonfire." Into this, advancing in succession, they cast the instruments and appliances of their profession — the scrolls, the amulets, the papers, the books; and this continued for some hours, until the whole of their stock in trade was completely consumed. The value of the property thus destroyed was, we are told, considerable. "They counted the price of the books and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver," a very large sum in those days, equal to about $25,000 of our money. Such, brethren, is the narrative to which our text belongs, rich in practical suggestiveness. Asking the direction of God's Holy Spirit, we shall regard two particulars.

1.

The Epistle-lesson for to-day, speaking of the works of the flesh, mentions witchcraft, to which we add its inseparable companion, "superstition." Is there such a thing as witchcraft? Our so-called enlightened and progressive age hoots at the idea, as an exploded and impossible thing, belonging to the age and relics of barbarism and far-off bigotry. Let us thank God that it is also one of the glorious fruits of the Gospel of Christ that the practise of witchcraft, sorcery, magic, and curious arts is not common among us; let us duly appreciate that. But if we regard the apostle's warning as an altogether superfluous thing, we are mistaken. There are no small remnants of this species of heathenism yet remaining in the midst of Christian lands. There is, for instance, fortune-telling, seeking to pry into the future, which God has mercifully, prudently, concealed from us; Spiritualism, a wave of which has again been passing over the land after the World War, communicating with the spirits of the departed, the shuffling

of cards to find out secret things, the whereabouts of stolen goods, and the like; there is the curing of diseases with words and certain signs and performances and the wearing of a scrap of paper, tinfoil, or some phylactery to ward off misfortune. Who has not heard of the chain-prayers of our days, the breaking of which is said to bring evil? How would you classify these prayers, if such they may be called? What mean the relics and the medals, the blessed candles, holy water, and shrines offered for sale by the Roman Catholic Church? what the blessing of handkerchiefs by the thousands by certain healers, calculated to bestow good fortune upon the owners? How are we to classify these things?

Intimately connected with these practises is superstition, *i. e.*, trusting in signs and believing a thing to be a factor for good or evil, which is not taught in the Scriptures nor founded in the laws of nature. The heathen lived by signs. The first thing he would do when rising in the morning was to look at the appearance of the heavens, the flight of birds, or what animal he would first meet; that would determine whether it would be a lucky or an unlucky day for him. Has this so essentially heathenish thing completely died out, or is it not rather found more generally than we may suppose? The howling of a dog at the door, believed to forebode the early death of an inmate of the house; the opening of the Bible at random to see if the passage first striking the eye promises good or evil fortune; the belief that a couple married on Friday will become unhappy; the popular conception that the number 13 is unlucky; and many other superstitions to be found in Christian communities, are these not proof that superstition has by no means lost its hold? Are there no books to be found in our community like those of the Ephesians, dream-books, almanacs containing all sort of superstitious matter, which are carefully consulted at times? As you pass along the store windows of our large cities, what a display of the old-fashioned kind of magic one may occasionally see — a leather-bound volume that claims to unlock all of nature's secrets and to enable the curing of the sick by charms and incantations, all for the paltry sum of five dollars; besides many small booklets, artistically bound. And there must be buyers; for the stock, if you watch it, dwindles. There is an abundance of superstition lurking about in this enlightened age, with all its affected superiority of intellect and boasted scientific progress, aeroplanes, automobiles, telephones, and wireless telegraphy. And the text tells us what disposition to make of such

books and paraphernalia, not only on the part of ignorant boors and scheming Gipsies, but on the part of many who claim to be highly enlightened and thoroughly schooled in science and in religion. Or can any one think of any who is more pretentious to education than the followers of Spiritualism?

We read that these people of Ephesus, under the deep conviction that such practise was wrong, and that their continuance in it could not be permitted with a good conscience, brought their books of curious arts and burned them. That ought to be the case with some in our days, literally. What ungodly, misleading, soul-destroying literature is to be found on many shelves! What scandalous mind- and heart-poisoning printed matter does not come weekly, daily, into our homes, deserving a fate like that of the books cast into the bonfire at Ephesus. But, figuratively, we ought to destroy such practises and beliefs. The apostle pronounces such beliefs and practises as belonging to the works of the flesh. We must not practise them. We must scrupulously avoid them; not be superstitious, but believing. We must not look for signs and omens, but trust in God's providence, commending our life and all things into His hands, knowing that all things work together for good to them that love Him. We must not seek to pry into the future, not seek to obtain healing by doubtful means, by holding converse with the spirit world, nor in any way employ means for which we have no warrant in Holy Scriptures. By the Word of God let our life be governed and guided; that Book let us read, its doctrines follow. As we sing in one of our hymns: —

> The various forms that men devise
> To shake my faith with treacherous art
> I scorn as vanity and lies
> And bind Thy Gospel to my heart.

2.

That is the first particular we would earnestly take home to ourselves. There is another. We heard that the incident of the text occurred in connection with the worship of the great Diana. That was idolatry. Idolatry means worship of an idol. These people were professedly members of Paul's congregation, yet secretly they indulged in things that were inconsistent with their Christian profession; they fell short of their standard as open, thorough disciples of Christ. That prompts me to speak of a matter which is deeply agitating our churches to-day, a matter regarding which there is diversity of opinion, and regarding which I am being asked continually, and that is the matter of lodgism.

The question put is: "What has the Church against the secret orders or fraternal organizations?" In answer permit me to state that we have nothing against the people who compose these organizations. On the contrary, we highly respect many of them and count them among our friends. So it is not from a spirit of animosity, but of pastoral responsibility that we answer the question: "What has the Church against the secret orders or fraternal organizations?" We answer with one word, a word mentioned in the epistle — "idolatry," because of their idolatry. To enter upon the subject. Have the orders referred to (we have in mind such orders as the Freemasons, Odd-Fellows, Knights of Pythias, Maccabees, Royal Arcanum, and similar), have these orders a religion? Have they prayers, altars, chaplains, high priests, rituals, orders of worship, and funeral ceremonies? How are their meetings opened and closed? Is there a Bible lying somewhere in a conspicuous place? No one will so deny. All this is more than enough to show that they are, in a sense, a religious institution, that they teach religious precepts and principles. Now, it need not be stated that every type of religion is not yet the religion of Jesus Christ and the Christian Church. How is it with the religion of lodgism? One of the conditions of membership in these organizations is the belief in a God, who is variously designated as the Supreme Being, the Supreme Intelligence, the Almighty Architect of the Universe, and so on. But, however variously designated, is this God the true God, whom we Christians worship and adore, He who has revealed Himself to us in the Bible, the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost? Do they acknowledge Jesus Christ, the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End of the Christian faith, around whom all Christianity revolves? Not a single order throughout the length and breadth of the land. No mention of the Triune God is made in the creed, the prayers, the rituals, and funeral ceremonies of these organizations. The name of our blessed Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is left out. It cannot appear, for according to their own statements, at their altars men of every religion may kneel, the Jew, the Mohammedan, the Brahmin, the Buddhist, none of whom believe in Christ as the Son of God and Savior of the world. But what do the Scriptures say? "All men should honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father, which hath sent Him." "Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks

to God and the Father by Him." That is the religion of Jesus Christ, and any other type is not the religion of Jesus Christ. What then? What word could you employ but that of the epistle — idolatry? And that is the reason why our Church is opposed to lodgism — because of its idolatry.

Let us not deceive ourselves. It has been asked, Why is it that so many good men are members of these orders, even Christian ministers? Why is our Church the only one that takes a stand against these organizations? As to the former question, we know and admit that many excellent men belong to them. The reason for it evidently is that they do not fully understand the true nature of Christianity or the true nature of the lodge. Far be it from us to impute to them low motives. As to the latter question, it is not true that our Church is the only one opposing such organizations. I could readily mention to you not less than twenty other Protestant denominations, besides many men, statesmen, educators, and others, who take the same stand. But regardless of such, the chief question is: What do the Scriptures say? That is our accepted guide, is it not? And the proof from this our guide in matters of faith and doctrine I have set forth in greatest and, I hope, convincing simplicity. Though the lodges have a type of religion, it is not the religion of the Bible, of the Christian Church, of our Creed; it is idolatry.

It is these organizations that our members are frequently asked to join, tempted to join for social, commercial, political, and other reasons. How should they act? How, to come back to our narrative, did these Ephesian Christians and the sorcerers act in respect to the species of idolatry they had to contend with? We can well conceive that their friends argued and expostulated with them. "Why forfeit your privileges, worldly advantages? You can retain your Christian convictions for all that," whilst outsiders disposed of them summarily by setting them down as fanatical fools who deserved to be dealt with with a jest or a sneer. We hear those same utterances to-day. Then again, "fifty thousand pieces of silver." They had much money invested. With some of them it meant to sacrifice an influential position, the means of gaining a livelihood. For all this they were prepared. They knew the sacrifice they were making and the ridicule they were sure to encounter; yet for conscience' sake and for religious principles' sake, for Christ's sake, whose religion was all in all to them, they did as they did. They were thoroughly in earnest; they accepted

the terms of their Master: "He that is not with Me is against Me," and so burned their books.

I see no other course open to us if we wish to be true to the admonitions of God's Word, consistent in our faith and Christian profession; and it is for this reason that our Church, as a spiritual mother, concerned about the spiritual welfare of her children, advises its members to stay out of, and depart from, these orders; yes, insists upon their doing so. I ask in all honesty, sincerity, and frankness, though it might be painful to your flesh and blood, Is our Church wrong in this? Can any one ask of her to sanction that which fosters idolatry, to keep her mouth closed and not utter a word of warning to those who have been brought up from earliest days amid her wholesome influences? That from a deep sense of pastoral responsibility have I once again done; the result I leave with the all-powerful Word of God and with yourselves, praying that you will act as becomes disciples of Christ, who are strong in the Lord and in the power of His might; being confident, too, that the concluding line of the text will apply: "So mightily grew the Word of God and prevailed." Amen.

Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity.

But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment, let us be therewith content. — *1 Tim. 6, 6—8.*

There is at present abroad in the world, manifesting its disastrous influences in all spheres and conditions, a moral disease, an ill and contagious malady. One reads of it in every newspaper and scans it in every face; in nearly every house which you enter you can discern its foul traces; and not only in public assemblies, council chambers, and state halls, but where two or three are gathered together in private conference, it forms the subject of earnest thought and animated discussion. And what, you inquire, is the name of this foul malady? One word will give it: Discontent, discontent, a feeling of dissatisfaction that has taken hold of all masses and classes, a spirit of restiveness and distemper, which denotes dissatisfaction with one's condition and lot in life, which expresses a distrust toward God and suspicion of one's fellow-man. Society is sick, disgruntled in head and heart, in chest and limbs, from center to circumference. And is there no remedy for this disease? Many doctors from many schools have

stepped forward to assuage these cramping ills, and all of them are positive of the healing properties of their prescriptions. Says the one class — their remedy indeed is radical —: "There must be some generous, unsparing blood-letting; we must dispose of these crowned heads, these magnates and Napoleons of finance; this world's goods and honors must be equally divided. Revolution and death to all who stand in the way!" We call that voice Bolshevism. It has become quite familiar these past years. Says another, who belongs to the school of Socialism: "Let reason have its sway; cut the mind loose from its enslaving traditions; starve out your priestcraft and your bother about an unknown God. Away with the worn-out nests of an antiquated faith, your old threadbare Gospel, your churches that foster ignorance and spiritual slavery! Let science dictate, reason reign, humanity and brotherhood!" "Nay," says another, "what we need is a stronger government and righteous enforcement of laws already existing." And so the discussion goes on. That reminds one of the woman who for twelve years had an issue of blood, and of whom it is recorded that she had spent all she had, but was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse. Just so society is meanwhile drifting, amid many a jolt and crash, God alone knows whither. But really, we speak with Jeremiah of old: "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician here?" Yes, there is a Physician here; there is healing balm for all the wounds and ailments of man, safe and efficient provision to assuage and mollify and eventually remove the ills of these perturbed and pressing times. The only drawback, and a great one, is that men will not seek that Physician nor accept and use that healing balm. But while the general mass will not, individuals here and there, like the Noahs and Lots amid the calamities of their day, may still find deliverance and peace of heart if they will but attend to the word that comes to us from God. One such word we find in the verses of our text. We may sum up its directions in the following items: —

1. Beware of covetousness — it is the root of all evil.
2. Diligently practise godliness — result: contentment.

1.

When a physician is summoned to a patient, the first thing he does to arrive at the seat and center of the trouble is to make a diagnosis; if he fails in that, his efforts are unsatisfactory and in vain. Applying this to the case in hand, what is the seat and

center, the source, of discontent? St. Paul, as a most skilled and experienced diagnostician, promptly informs us: Covetousness; that, he declares, is the root of all evil. And what is covetousness? Covetousness is the desire of having more, not of having more because there is not enough, but more when a man thinks he has not enough; more when he has enough; more, ever more. This is the giant factor that is at the bottom of all our social grievances, political, family, and business dissensions, the spirit which is setting the world at variance. Not content with legitimate gain, the manufacturer and employer is in ill mood because he cannot put larger profits into his pocket; not content with respectable tenants, a fair rental, proprietors ruthlessly thrust them out without much feeling as to the inconvenience created; let them see to that. Actuated by covetousness, huge corporations, railroads, and transit companies deprive their employees of opportunities for recreation and worship, not even granting them a free Sunday once a month. Prompted by covetousness, stupendous monopolies, syndicates, and trusts, like heartless boa constrictors that have coiled their deadly fangs around our body politic, hoarded up millions of wealth, seek to extract the uttermost farthing from the dependent masses. No longer satisfied with a fair wage, reasonable hours, and lawful dividends, the laborer and domestic demands the shortest possible limit of time with the highest possible amount of income; and if he does not instantly obtain it, it means a strike.

No wonder that, with men's minds thus astir, social conditions are like the restless waves of the ocean when whipped by the winds of a storm. We need money; it is indispensable, and we are entitled to a share of it. The apostle speaks of "food and raiment," and our Lord taught us to pray for our "daily bread" as something coming to every man, and to that end we should labor, and a laborer is worthy of his hire, he should receive the just reward of his labor. There is nothing improper in the equalizing of dividends; on the contrary, the law of equity demands it. Woe unto them that build their fortunes by unrighteousness and their mansions by wrong, that use their neighbor's service without wages and give them not for their work, is God's own declaration. Industry should share in the legitimate profits to the supply of "food and raiment." That is one thing. Another is that people are not content with the supply of "food and raiment." It is not necessaries they desire, but superfluities; not provision for their real needs, but gratification of their lusts, selfish ambitions. People proceed

on the erroneous notion that contentment is bound up with plenty. They gaze upon the stately mansion and grounds of a multi-millionaire, saying, "If I could but dwell in such a place, dress in such fineries, and fare and ride and travel thus sumptuously, I would be happy." There is no doubt that the world, by reason of great prosperity, has become extremely materialistic. To use the common language of commerce, "Money talks"; or to use the Savior's expression: They hold "that a man's life consisteth in the abundance of the things which he possesseth"; and it is because the money standard has become the value standard that to the question, What is a man worth? the world replies by telling you what he *has,* how much money and property, not what he *is,* in character and conduct; and because people wish to appear as being able to live luxuriously and as well as others, they do not feel content with what makes for the supply of their real needs, but crave for the gratification of artificial ones, envy the property of others. And so we have this restless passion of covetousness, the master spring, origin, and cause of discontent. Nor let any one regard himself exempt. It is the inborn, constitutional, and chronic moral depravity of the natural man; no man living is without it, and no man living perhaps ever gets rid of it entirely as long as he lives on earth. And yet, like our bodily diseases, it can be checked, lest, running its course, it do us harm for this world and the next.

2.

But how can it be checked? The apostle tells us when he says that "godliness" is the remedy for discontent. What is godliness, and in what respect is it "great gain"? Godliness is that disposition, that state of mind in which man has found his highest good in God and sets God before him at all times, so that he implicitly fears, loves, and trusts in Him above all things, and so feels safe that God will supply all his wants and withhold from him nothing that is good for him. We are all living the life of the flesh. We have bodies, we have families. These questions, "What shall we eat? What shall we drink? Wherewithal shall we be clothed?" equally perplex us and engage our thoughts. But not unduly so; not to the extent of crushing out all cheer with overanxieties and pressing cares about them, making those things a veritable nightmare and causing us to be discontented and morose. Godliness prevents that; for it knows of a heavenly Father; it believes that He is a Father who has all things at His disposal, and

who clothes the lilies of the fields and supplies the needs of fowls of the air; will He, therefore, not heed and supply the claims and necessities of His children? He brought us into the world, He pledged to see us through the world, and He will attend to it. Oh, ye of little faith, who give yourselves over to vexation and torment on that account and hang your heads in sullen discontent! Your heavenly Father knows that you have need of all these things. Well, then, in the exercise of such a faith look up to Him, confide in Him, and be assured that you will not lack food to sustain your body nor raiment to put on.

Again, godliness is "great gain" in that it renders us content with whatever condition and station we are in in life. Much of our dissatisfaction arises from the feeling that we are not in the place and position in which, in our own estimation, we ought to be. There are not a few who are chafing under the impression that they missed their calling, or that adverse circumstances, modesty, or some other handicap have permitted those of less sterling character and inferior caliber to forge ahead of them and kept them in the background, and this has tended to make them soured and discontented. A wonderful remedy to offset any such impression is godliness; for godliness works the conviction that you are just where God in His wise providence would have you to be; it puts your mind at rest, for you are convinced that the place you are occupying, the particular sphere in which you are moving, has been portioned out to you by His infinite wisdom and love, and that the only thing for you to do is to acquit yourself in it as becomes a faithful follower of His, to be conscientious in the performance of your duties. And what a marvelous tonic that conviction is! How it makes one so much more useful and satisfied!

And again, where there is godliness in the heart, it will regulate one's conduct toward one's fellow-man. A godly man never takes advantage of another man in any transaction. True morality and the principles of religion are the foundation of all political and social truths, and the moment men swerve from them, they invite disaster. What better two rules can be laid down for the adjustment of all dealings between employer and employee than these: "Masters, give unto your workmen that which is just and equal"; "Workmen, do your duty toward your master or employer, not with eye-service, but as doing the will of God," that is, under a sense of obligation to God, devoting all the time and labor for which he employs and pays you? If these rules of Christian justice

and honesty were followed, there would be no unjust actions on the part of either. Because so many fail to do so, we have the present upheaval and discontent in the industrial and social world. What we need as individuals, as families, as a nation, is godliness; then we would have the sister grace, which is contentment. You cannot have the one without the other; they are inseparable; godliness teaches contentment, and contentment follows godliness.

Let us be diligent in our earthly calling, toiling honestly, and practise economy, even laying aside what we can. But let us guard against the most corruptive, treacherous, and soul-destroying passion on earth, called covetousness, the greed of the heart for the possession of this world's goods. Whilst giving attention to your book of bank accounts, do not forget the other, which tells of treasures which moths and rust cannot corrupt and which thieves cannot enter in and steal. While contemplating for yourselves the building of a home, do not overlook that tabernacle not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Let not the materialism and commercialism of our day crush out the spirit of human kindness and sympathy and consideration of others. Cultivate a firm trust in God, heeding the advice of divine wisdom: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God." Ever and everywhere, in whatever position or condition, be godly, remembering whose you are, until you shall at last enter the tranquil blessedness of true and perfect eternal contentment as heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ Jesus, our Savior. Amen.

Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity.

Now, there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas; this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did. And it came to pass in those days that she was sick and died; whom, when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber. And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them. Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber; and all the widows stood by him weeping and showing the coats and garments which Dorcas made while she was with them. But Peter put them all forth and kneeled down and prayed; and turning him to the body, said, Tabitha, arise! And she opened her eyes; and when she saw Peter, she sat up. And he gave her his hand and lifted her up and, when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive. And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord. — *Acts 9, 36—42.*

Of all the places that are visited these days by the tourists of the Holy Land, one of the most interesting is that which their eyes first view as they near its sacred shores, the place mentioned in the text, Joppa, a city situated about forty miles from Jerusalem. It is often mentioned in the Bible. It was from here that King Solomon received large stores of timbers for the building of his most magnificent Temple. It was here that Jonah, the prophet, when he sought to flee from the presence of the Lord, found a ship going to Tarshish. Here Peter lodged by the seashore, in the house of one Simon, a tanner, where he had his wonderful vision of the sheet that came down from heaven. But of all things, the most important that happened at Joppa was the miraculous occurrence related in these lines just read from Scripture. Five topics, as we analyze it, are offered for our Christian instruction: the life, the death, the mourning, the resurrection, and the presentation after the resurrection of the person returned to life. May these points, briefly and practically considered, serve to build up in us our most holy faith.

1.

The name Tabitha, or Dorcas, the one word Aramaic and the other Greek, means antelope, or gazelle, an animal distinguished for its slender and beautiful form and its graceful movements; it was often employed as a feminine name. Whether the physical characteristics of beauty and gracefulness applied to the person under consideration we know not; neither are we greatly interested, for what does beauty of figure and loveliness of face, admirable gifts of God as they may be, amount to without the corresponding graces and good qualities of the heart; and of these, the sacred penman tells us, the person referred to was eminently possessed. The first particular given is that she was a disciple. It is not said of whom, nor was it necessary. Christians have but one Master and Teacher, Jesus Christ. As one of His scholars she took her place, like Mary of Bethany, at His feet; she was attentive to His Word and His divine instructions. In brief, she was a woman of faith; that was, as it is with all Christians, the principle of her character. And this faith, we are told, was most active; in verse 36 it says: "She was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did." The general impression is that Dorcas was a well-to-do virgin, or that she was a widow, who, having no family of her own, found her delight in looking after the wants of others, and for her beneficence she selected that large family everywhere to be

found — orphans and indigent widows. Possessed of a tender and sympathetic heart and very nimble fingers, she was a ministering angel to the poor, and this, according to St. James, is religion; for thus says the apostle: "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction." What a model she was in this respect! What selfish lives some people lead! If they give anything to charity, it is wrung from them with so much difficulty that you feel almost reluctant to accept the pittance; if they hear of others doing anything, it is with that self-justifying remark: "I guess they have it to give." Plenty for comfort and entertainment, self-indulgence and ornament, but as for charity, that is theoretically and at a distance a very nice thing. And still in this cold, selfish, hard-hearted world there are those to be found who have the spirit of a Dorcas, who practise benevolence. May God grant an increase in the number of those who have a beneficent hand! So much as to the character and activity of Dorcas.

2.

"And it came to pass in those days that she was sick and died; whom, when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber." How old Dorcas was, what caused her departure, probably a fever caught while nursing at a bedside, a cold occasioned by exposure, or a stroke that paralyzed her busy and overtaxed fingers, we are not told, but like to all others the summons to go hence came. Death is a universal and relentless ruler. Ties of affection, age, sex, station in life, these count for naught; the child at its mother's breast, the daughter in her loveliness, the young man in his promise and strength, the statesman in his wisdom, or the man of affairs busy with his concerns, all alike fall before his sweeping sickle. And universal as he is, just so mysterious are his tactics. In the verses immediately preceding this account we hear of another disciple, named Aeneas, who had been confined to his bed through palsy for the long period of eight years. In our short-sighted judgment, comparing the accounts, we are apt to think that it must surely have been better for others and better for Aeneas himself had he been summoned rather than this woman of benevolent activity. Is it not so in our own experiences? How unsearchable at times are God's judgments and His ways past finding out! How frequently the question quivers upon our lips, Why hast Thou done this? Why didst Thou nip this little flower, this beautiful

child, in the bud? Why didst Thou take away this promising youth, so full of vitality and hope and ambition? why this man from his family, those dependent upon him, or the mother from her children? But it is not for us to lift the veil from such providences; they belong to a class of events the full explanation of which will be given in the world in which we shall know even as we are known. Let us bear in mind, when such mysterious dispensations befall us, that our world is not a system complete in itself; it is part of a greater system, many of whose reasons are to be sought only beyond the grave, where eternity will prove the great interpreter of the events of time.

3.

And, we are informed, it was a death sincerely mourned over. There are those who pass out of the world unnoticed or even amid exultations of people, as if some great deliverance had come to them. The Bible records that, when the wicked King Ahab died, his people made no burying for him as they did when his father died. There was universal joy in Rome at the death of Emperor Nero, that human monster, who caused the death of thousands and thousands of innocent Christians; and Josephus, the Jewish historian, tells of one of the Herods that, when he was about to die, aware of the joy which his death would be likely to produce, he gave orders that a great number of the nobility should be assassinated when he would die, that Jerusalem might be compelled to go into mourning on the occasion. No such forced sorrow was needed when that good woman Dorcas died. Spontaneous and profound was the grief when they laid her lifeless body in that upper chamber.

My beloved hearers, before we pass on, may we not indulge the wish that, when our casket is carried forth from our home or from the church where we loved to commune with God and our fellow-Christians, it may be accompanied with the feeling that, like Dorcas, a worker will be missed from the ranks, a name grown endeared canceled from the list of membership, and that at least a little circle of such be present as appreciate the fact that we lived to make them happier and drop a tear of sympathy upon our casket? Or is this wrong? it may be well to emphasize for once. Did the Christians of whom we read in our text regard it wrong to mourn? They were not heathen Stoics, who stiffened their minds and hearts as some do in our days, coldly pronouncing death an

inevitable occurrence happening to all, which one's grief cannot alter. Nor were they deluded Christian Scientists, who, denying sin and its consequent punishment, restrain their bursting emotions and affect an unnatural air of joyousness and indifference. What shall we say when we read that our Lord said to those sorrowing parents, "Weep not"? Did He wish to convey that it is sinful and wrong to give vent to our feelings in times of bereavement? Did He not Himself shed tears at the grave of Lazarus, over apostate Jerusalem, and in the Garden of Gethsemane? The shortest verse in our English Bible is this: "Jesus wept." And do not the Scriptures record that Abraham, the father of believers, mourned for Sarah, Joseph for Jacob, David for Jonathan and even for rebellious Absalom, and that devout men, accompanying Stephen to his death, made great lamentation over him? Grief must have its vent. The gift of tears is a greater one than we are apt to think. Let the bursting heart have its way. Christ and true religion do not forbid it; what they do forbid is the excess of it.

4.

At the same time, to continue with our narrative, these afflicted women had recourse to the proper means for relief. They did not sit down in sullen despair or give themselves up to hard thoughts of God. Their Christianity had taught them not to mourn, but to hope.

They learn that Peter is only six miles distant, at Lydda, and they send for him, asking him to minister to their divine comfort. Properly so. The presence of a man of God in a house of mourning is always a comfort. Let the custom to send for the minister in seasons of sickness and sorrow continue among us. It is Scriptural. It is profitable. The apostle follows the summons. On arriving at Joppa and seeing the distress of the people, he, no doubt, besought the Lord to grant him power to raise the deceased benefactress of the poor. The first thing he did was to send the mourners who were crowded around the corpse away, and when he was alone with the dead, he "kneeled down and prayed and, turning him to the body, said 'Tabitha, arise!' And she opened her eyes; and when she saw Peter, she sat up. And he gave her his hand and lifted her up and, when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive." What an astonishing miracle! Peter had a number of objects in view in working this miracle. One was the comfort he afforded by giving to these sorrowing ones their dearest earthly

friend, kindling anew the light that had been extinguished in their dwellings. Another was the powerful attestation which it gave to his preaching; it proved that the Christian religion, of which he was the outstanding representative, was true. Miracles of this nature were needed in that age, and so God performed them through the apostle, as we read in verse 42: "It was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord."

What an instruction this account conveys to us! Of many particulars that we in our inquisitiveness would ascertain nothing is told — how Dorcas felt during her state of absence from the body; what she said about her passage out of this world into the realms of departed spirits. These are questions concerning which this present age is so very alert; but it is well for us not to pry into the things which God has so graciously withheld.

But one thing this account of the raising of Dorcas from the dead does teach in unmistakable, most positive, and most startling letters, the infallible truth which every Lord's day we repeat when in the Apostles' Creed we confess our faith: "I believe in the resurrection of the body." Human philosophy, man's crass materialism, may hoot as preposterous at the doctrine that this tenement of clay, this framework of the body, when the breath of life has passed from its nostrils, can and will start up again from its elements of decay. However, this is not at all so unreasonable; for, to quote St. Paul, why should it be a thing incredible with you that God, who created the body, will reanimate, reconstruct that body? But leaving aside other lines of argumentation, — what though Lazarus had lain four days in the tomb? There was One whose "Come forth!" instantly quickened the dissolving clay. What though the ruler's youthful daughter lay shrouded in the death-chamber? There was One whose "Talitha, cumi; Damsel, I say unto thee, Arise!" presently broke the trance of death. What though they are bearing away to his last resting-place the remains of the widow's only son? There was One who said, "Young man, I say unto thee, arise!" and immediately that young man came back to life. And the same omnipotence this same divine Person exercises through His instrument, the apostle, when he said, "Tabitha, arise!" That scene yonder in the upper chamber at Joppa is a faint portrait, a feeble foreshadowing, of that final, universal scene that shall be enacted upon this earth when from ten thousands of cemeteries, or wherever their moldering dust may be, there shall start up the myriads of earth's departed ones, where-

upon this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality. Very wisely does the Church, surrounded as we daily are by the sad ravages of death and the uncertainty of our own departure, occasionally draw our reflections to such texts as these. Yes, in the midst of life we are in death; of whom may we seek help and comfort but of Thee, O Lord?

5.

Finally, there is the presentation. "Peter gave her his hand and lifted her up and, when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive." Even thus, dear hearers, will it be at the Last Day. Abraham shall once more see his Sarah; Jacob, the Rachel whom he loved so tenderly and mourned so deeply. David shall find again his little son. Devout men who accompanied Stephen to his burial and made lamentation over him shall know then that men could only kill the body, and even that not forever. There shall be reunions, recognitions, as in the case mentioned here of Dorcas, and servants of the Lord shall be restored to one another. Dorcas shall meet again those to whom she ministered; they, in turn, shall rise up and call her blessed. Children shall meet again with the parents who loved them and trained them in their helpless infancy and in their youth; parents shall meet again their children who made their old age happy and honorable. It is a most significant statement which St. Paul makes: "I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named." What does he mean by "the whole family in heaven"? Whom can he mean but the glorified Christians, those who are absent from us in the body, yet belong to the Church, the Church Triumphant? Lost from our sight, departed, as far as our senses are concerned, we are disposed to regard them cut off from union with us, separated from the body of Christ. That is not the Bible conception; the family relation has not ceased with death. We sing in one of our hymns: —

> The saints on earth and those above
> But one communion make;
> One family we dwell in Him,
> One Church above, beneath,
> Though now divided by the stream,
> The narrow stream of death.

It is a Scriptural thought, in accord with the entire trend of the Word of God, and a most encouraging, cheering one, that, when the King of Terrors visits our firesides and we bid farewell to our

loved ones as they depart from these earthly scenes, the family relation has not ceased. The ties that bind us together in Christ Jesus are never disrupted. There will be a reunion and recognition. And among those whom we shall learn to know shall be Dorcas, the disciple at Joppa, whose resurrection we have spoken of. Meanwhile, may we seek to imitate her in her faith, her active benevolence, and, falling asleep in Him who is the Resurrection and the Life, be awakened to a life of everlasting blessedness in that glorious realm where there shall be no more sin, no more death nor crying; for these things shall then have passed away. But whatever the dispensations of God's providence, it behooves us to act as Christians, to bow our heads in resignation and believing humility, confessing: —

Beloved, it is well;
God's ways are always right,
And perfect love is o'er them all,
Though far above our sight.

Amen.

Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity.

I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord. — *Ps. 122, 1.*

The man who spoke these words was not an ignorant person, but a man of grand and exquisite intellect and genius; neither was he a person of a weak, debilitated body or of a droopy, melancholy frame of mind, but a man of strong and powerful frame, and one who found pleasure in the beauties of nature and the firmament of the heavens. Nor was he a person who had a great deal of time hanging idly upon his hands, who knew scarcely what to do with himself for the lack of occupation. He was a man of unlimited activity, the busy ruler of a prosperous and wide-spread people, who had a huge amount of work to attend to on week-days, and who with a thousand times more plausibility than some might have regarded himself excused from attending the Lord's house on the Sabbath-day. But he does not wish to be excused. Quite the contrary. "It is time to go to the house of the Lord," those about him had remarked. And his response was not, "Do not molest me; I am well aware what time it is, and I know what to do!" but, according to the line of our text: "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of

the Lord." He rejoiced when that time had come and hailed it with pleasure and delight, and he went with them. And why? What constituted the reason for this gladness? That, as a suitable topic for this Sunday, would we reflect upon for our instruction, encouragement, rebuke, and comfort. God bless His Word!

Why Does a Christian Go to the House of His Lord?

We answer, for four reasons: —

1. Because God directs him to do so.
2. Because he wishes to receive instruction.
3. Because he longs for spiritual refreshment.
4. Because he desires to set a good example.

1.

It is a divine command, graven by God's own finger upon tables of stone: "Thou shalt sanctify the holy-day." That already ought to settle it. Whether you wish it or not, whether the services are interesting or not, whether churchgoing is fashionable and popular or not, — attending church is a solemn and bounden duty, enjoined by the Lord, corroborated by His apostles, and confirmed by the practises of God's people everywhere and at all times. Already the relation which exists between the Creator and the creature, between the Giver of all and the receiver of all, should teach us, apart from an expressed wish of God Himself, that it is our bounden duty to assemble in the house of God and to bring to Him, to whom we owe our life here and our hope in life hereafter, homage and worship. But that we may have no pretense whatever for neglecting it and no excuse to err in this great matter, God has directly enjoined upon us in unmistakable terms the obligation of united, public worship. And this injunction may be traced throughout the whole history of the Church from its earliest infancy. Away back in the days of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob the godly reared their altars and worshiped at them. To afford a place and an occasion for worship, God commanded the Tabernacle to be built in the wilderness, and He Himself furnished the exact pattern for the Temple in Jerusalem, whither the tribes went up to offer sacrifice and praise and prayers. Our blessed Lord, in the days of His flesh, was an unfailing and constant attendant at the services of the synagogs. The first words that we have from His divine lips were spoken in and for the Temple: "Know ye not that I must be about My Father's business?" It was in the public assembly of the disciples that He appeared and made Him-

self known after His resurrection. In an assembly, when they were all gathered together in one place engaged in devotion, was the Spirit of God outpoured on Pentecost. In the Acts of the Apostles we read in one place that on the Sabbath-day almost the whole city came together to hear the Word of God. What a rebuke to some communities in this Christian land and enlightened twentieth century! And in another place the apostle exhorts the followers of Christ by no means to forsake the assembling of themselves together. For this reason, therefore, because public worship was ordained by God Himself, was David glad; and we, too, subscribe to these simple and stately words of the Catechism: "We should fear and love God that we may not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it." That is one reason why a Christian attends church: God has commanded it.

2.

A Christian attends church, however, also for *instruction.* Instruction in what? There are some who have mistaken ideas about churches. They regard them as institutions for entertainment — musical, intellectual, ethical, social. When they go to church, they want to hear the man in the pulpit discourse with a great deal of rhetoric on political, sociological, philosophical, moral topics. They are not like the renowned statesman who remarked that he heard enough of politics and rhetoric on week-days; on Sunday, therefore, he wanted to get into some quiet chapel where he could hear nothing but the simple story of the Savior's love. It is that simple story of a Savior's love, of salvation, peace, and pardon in Christ Jesus, that has been the reigning topic in this building, and that, God grant, shall ever reverberate within these walls. Rather would we have these stones and beams crumble to earth and their dust be carried away by the winds of heaven than that there shall be preached here anything else than the glad tidings of the grace of God in Christ Jesus, the message telling us how poor, sinful, condemned creatures, who have broken God's Law and incurred His punishment, may be pardoned and saved.

"But have we not learned that already in school and in catechism instructions?" My beloved, be not deceived. There are such heights and depths and lengths and breadths in Christian knowledge that it cannot be all taken in at once. The greatest of theologians, the wisest of Bible students are, at best, like children on the seashore. They may gather many precious pebbles and

beautiful shells, but the vast ocean of truth still lies unexplored before them. Even the most familiar parts of it we need to have continually repeated in our ears. It is with these services as with our meals. The body needs to be fed every day, and several times a day, if its vital forces are to be retained. And who has ever heard of a person's growing tired of bread and other victuals? Should we, then, not need every Lord's day, once a week, the spiritual food, the Bread so essential to supply vigor and elasticity to the soul? Not a service, not a sermon, but you will receive some fresh and clearer view of Christ, if you are attentive; and the Spirit of God will bless and deepen the conception of some familiar truth and duty. There is such a thing as not only knowing, but growing, and such growth takes place *here*. You will find that the best-informed Christians, those who, like David, meditate in God's Word day and night, are the very ones to say: "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord," even as I recall one who said to me that it was useless for him to go to church because he knew it all. On his death-bed I found his soul so destitute of Christian knowledge that he had not enough to enable him to die in peace. Let ours, for instruction in God's holy truth, the supply of regular and proper soul-food, be the attitude and conduct of the man who wrote the words of our text. That is the second reason why a Christian goes to church.

3.

There is no doubt that another source of David's joy, why he was glad to attend the public worship of the sanctuary, was because he there received *spiritual refreshment*. David's life was by no means a life of ease. Partly owing to the prominent position which he occupied with its tremendous responsibilities, partly because of family anxieties and bereavements, of which he had plenty, and partly on account of his weaknesses and failings he many a time had to eat the bread of sorrow; yea, had it not been for the messages of God's consolation which were offered him in the Tabernacle, it is possible that his troubled spirit would have sunk in the deep waters. As it was, he went to the house of God wearied in body and troubled in mind, burdened with a nation's cares and his own. But there God met him and took the heavy load from off his heart, and filled his mind with calm and holy joy, and with that wondrous peace of His which passeth all understanding; and he came forth from those blessed seasons of retire-

ment and communion with Jehovah into the midst of his people a new man, filled with the might and spirit of the Lord of hosts, prepared to enter once more, and with increased vigor, into the hurry, the bustle, the excitement, and the worries of kingly life. Ah! no wonder that, having seen the glory of God in the Sanctuary and having quaffed so deeply the waters drawn fresh and clear and sparkling from the wells of salvation, he should break forth with the intensity of his zealous nature, "My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth, for the courts of the Lord. My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God." "Lord, I have loved the habitation of Thy house, and the place where Thine honor dwelleth." "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord."

We have no nation's care upon our shoulders and no crown pressing heavily upon our brow; but we have our own individual cares and anxieties and our own hard struggles in the race of life, and ofttimes we feel so worn and fagged with the hurry and bustle of the world that we are well-nigh ready to sink beneath the pressure upon us, and we experience an intense yearning for rest, an earnest longing for something, — perhaps some of us scarcely know for what, — but something that we do not find in the whirl of activity or the excitement of pleasure. Ah! thank God, many of us know where to find that something, that deep, spiritual refreshment, that peace which the world cannot give. Here in the house of prayer, every time the doors are opened for public worship, God awaits the depressed soul, that has its own sadness and knows its own bitterness, which it perhaps cannot and dare not communicate to any fellow-mortal, and whispers to each poor, needy, longing soul: "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Oh, brethren, here is inspiration and comfort for all who will but come and partake of it. Let us approach the footstool of divine mercy in a humble, contrite, and devotional spirit; we shall never go away empty, but issue forth strong in the strength which God supplies through His eternal Son. For "they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint." And, dear hearers, you would forego that?

4.

Another reason why I think David was glad to attend public worship of God was because of his *example*. We all know something of the immense force which there is in example. And where

would the force of example be likely to be stronger than in the relation of a king to his people? If the court is gay and licentious, the mass of the people will quickly follow in the same paths; if, on the other hand, an example for good is set by those in authority, its influence will pervade all ranks of society. Now, I suppose, no man ever lived who possessed a greater knowledge of the human heart than David. He knew if he were punctual in his attendance at public services the force of his example would react upon the people. The people would be true to their God and, consequently, true to their king and true to themselves, and would fulfil in their own experience the inspired statement of David himself, "Happy is that people whose God is the Lord." Therefore David says: "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord." I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holy-day.

And so the last reason why it should be a source of joy to us, too, even as it was to David, to be regular and punctual in our attendance upon the public means of grace, is that we may become examples for good to those around us, in whose cold hearts and lifeless souls the church-bell awakens no responsive echo, to whom the Lord's day is either a wearisome time or a day given up to the world more so even than any day in the week. And here you have an advantage over your ministers. When we get the people here, we can preach to them, but you can induce them to come to church far better than we can. Be assured that, when you give up a few hours of comfort and the cheerful glow of your fireside and turn out, it may be, into the blinding snow or the pelting rain or the dismal fog, to go into the house of the Lord, you are doing far more by these your silent, but practical, examples than we can hope to accomplish by any amount of persuasion.

It was a noble answer that an old saint of God who had been for years very deaf, once gave to her minister when he asked her why she was so constant in her attendance at church: "Though I cannot hear, I come to God's house because I love it. It brings to me many sacred recollections. I can see the minister speak, and I can read the hymns which the congregation sings. Another reason is because I am in the best of company, in the most immediate presence of God, and among His people. I am not satisfied with serving God in private; it is my duty and privilege to honor Him regularly and constantly in public." Who can tell the mighty influence which the example of that poor deaf woman had upon

her friends and her neighbors? And if time would permit, I could tell you of other instances, of Christians who are even to-day obliged to travel many miles Sunday after Sunday to the nearest church.

And who does not think of the days of persecution, when those who dared to follow the apostle's injunction to assemble themselves together to listen to God's Word and join in prayer and praise were hunted down as if they were beasts. The time was when in this very city of ours no Protestant minister was allowed to conduct services, but under cover of night had to cross over the river and return before break of day. And then think of the privileges we possess in a land of religious freedom, where North, East, South, and West we can hear the hallowed chimes of the bell inviting to worship, and in a city where the doors of the sanctuary stand open in friendly welcome.

How it ought to rebuke some of us! Beware of excuses! It may be that sickness, infirmity, some legitimate cause, may prevent those who would be glad to go into the house of the Lord. Such, far from receiving blame, deserve sympathy. On the other hand, if the excuses which arise are such as ought not to be indulged in, if, for instance, you abstain from going to church under such circumstances as would not prevent you from going to a place of amusement or to the house of a friend, then I hesitate not to say that such conduct is a disgrace to your Christian profession and a dishonor to your God. And therefore, brethren, I would earnestly and affectionately ask you to test your excuses when they present themselves. Examine them carefully whether they are such as you will dare to present to the Judge upon the throne when on that dread day He will ask you why your place in the sanctuary was vacant so often. And if your consciences tell you that those excuses are of such a nature that you dare not for very shame produce them before God, they must be abandoned without delay. It means the salvation of your souls.

To which permit me to add another caution. It pertains to those who without real cause, without just or substantial reason, are content with attending only one service on Sunday. That, they resolve, constitutes the full measure of their worship. But why? If we derive blessing and benefit, as we heard, from one public service, why not more so from two? If our example counts in one case, why not in both? And the facts are there that it does. Does lack of attendance at divine services show a great hungering

and thirsting after righteousness and the deep feeling which the psalmist voiced in the exclamation: "My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God"?

We submit this matter to your careful and reverent reflection. Do not throw it off lightly.

These, then, are the reasons why a Christian always gladly attends church: 1) Because of God's command; 2) because of the instruction received there; 3) because of the comfort and refreshment the preaching of the Word provides; 4) because he thereby sets a Christian example. Such have been the favors offered in this edifice. May God graciously continue them to us! May He bless our congregation, our coming in and our going out! May this earthly temple be as a spiritual lighthouse, shedding round about in this community the radiance of the Gospel, revealing to sinners the only entrance to the harbor of safety and peace! May it be like a shadow of a great rock, to which earth's tired, footsore, perishing pilgrims may come and find refuge and rest! May it be a vestibule leading on to the habitations and blessedness and joy which God has prepared for you who love Him and worship Him here on earth! Amen.

Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity.

And when He was come into His own country, He taught them in their synagog, insomuch that they were astonished and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary? and His brethren James and Joses and Simon and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us? Whence, then, hath this man all these things?

Matt. 13, 54—56.

The people of Nazareth had been listening to a sermon. It was a sermon the like of which they had never heard before, so different from the discourses they were accustomed to hear Sabbath after Sabbath from their scribes. It pulsated with life and heavenly truth, and it went direct to the heart and left those who heard it in a state of amazement. "Whence," they said one to another, "hath this man this wisdom and these mighty works?" And not only did they wonder at the sermon, they wondered at the preacher. "Whence hath this man this wisdom?" Had the sermon come from the lips of the greatest rabbi in the land, it would have been

a marvel, but coming from the lips of "this man," it was more than a marvel, it was a miracle. The Preacher was no stranger to them. He had lived among them for thirty years as a boy and a man. For fifteen years of that time He had been a mechanic in their midst. He had perhaps helped to build the houses of some of them; He had made the furniture and mended the plows and harrows of others. It was only a few weeks since He had left the carpenter's shop and taken to preaching. This was His first visit to Nazareth after entering on His public career, and this was the first sermon preached in the hearing of His fellow-townsmen, and it left them in a state of bewilderment. When we see a man endowed with special and extraordinary qualities, we look for the secret chiefly to two things; first, to his parentage, and secondly, to his education. But the more these people thought about His parentage, the more astonished they became. "Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary? and His brethren James and Joses and Simon and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us?" His kinsfolk were plain Galilean peasants. Nor had He received a higher education of any kind. He had never gone to Jerusalem, like Saul of Tarsus, to sit at the feet of some learned rabbi, such as Gamaliel; the instruction received at the little village synagog and from a peasant mother was all the instruction He had received. And now such wisdom! They did not know what to make of it.

And as with these Nazarenes, so the impression was a general one. If you turn to your gospels, you will be surprised to find how often we are told that the people "marveled" or "were astonished" at what Jesus said or did. We think of the Temple scene when He was twelve years of age; He sat among the doctors, and all that heard Him were amazed at His understanding and answers. When He had preached that Sermon on the Mount, "the multitudes were astonished at His teachings," St. Matthew tells us. Moreover, all classes alike experienced this — friends and foes, Pharisees and Herodians, a Caiaphas and a Pontius Pilate. With all that came into contact with Him Jesus everywhere created the impression that He was unique. And to go a step farther; the wonderful mystery and marvel — Jesus — appeared to the Nazarenes and to the people of Palestine generally what He is to-day. He is the unaccountable man, the wonder and amazement of the world, who cannot be classed with others; who, as He stands before us, as He did before the congregation at Nazareth nearly 1900 years ago, still invites the question: "Whence hath this man this wisdom

and these mighty works?" Suggested by the Gospel-lesson that is what

1. We shall seek to account for; 2. Make suitable application.

The Lord grant His blessing!

1.

The first particular these Nazarenes fastened upon was our Lord's wisdom. "Whence hath this man this wisdom?" The Jews had their great rabbis, such as Shammai and Hillel, men of eminent learning and intellect; but what is all their knowledge, as transmitted to us, but as dust and dross compared with the wisdom that fell from the lips of Jesus? They appear as mere children in their mastery of divine things compared with this peasant Preacher. Many great thinkers have appeared in the course of the world's history. To recall but a few names which we have all heard — Plato and Aristotle, Kant and Newton, Homer and Virgil, Shakespeare and Goethe, Dante and Milton. These men were great men, supremely gifted men, who tower above the ordinary level of humanity as some great mountain height over the valley nestling at its feet. Yet, placed sided by side with Jesus of Nazareth, there is no comparison. Socrates was rated the wisest of ancient philosophers. And sometimes the teaching of this teacher of morality is compared with the teachings of Christ. There is a world of difference between them. In the teachings of the wisest of Greeks you will find the most shameful idolatry and superstitious falsities, and his wisdom is to-day largely out of date. Not so with Christ's words. And the most outstanding feature is this, that Jesus teaches with authority. Take all merely human teachings, and they speak the language of uncertainty, conjecture. Not so with Christ. You will find no hint or suggestion of ignorance. He speaks about the deepest truths, about heaven and hell and God, in the unfaltering tone of One who has perfect and absolute knowledge. The greatest and sublimest truths dropped from His lips. His statements, as they are most authoritative, are the sweetest, calmest, simplest, wisest words ever spoken by man to man, which age has not dimmed nor familiarity spoiled. Take one single gospel, take but one single chapter of the gospels, let your eye rest thoughtfully upon each utterance of His, and your verdict cannot but be: "Never man spake like this Man."

To the feature which we have just spoken of we would add another outstanding and distinguishing characteristic. Would you

know anything of one of the great men of the past, you must read his history, if there exists a biography of him. And so in respect to Jesus Christ. Of such biographies we have four, written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. And as you take them into your hands, you cannot fail to be struck with one particular, and that is the matchless character of Him of whom you are reading. We sometimes lose sight of this. A glorious sunset illumines the western sky; because so frequent, we regard it less highly than the shooting of a few sky-rockets and a little pyrotechnic display; so we are not as generally and deeply impressed by the character of Christ as we ought to be. Familiar from infancy with the exterior facts, we often lose the meaning and charm. And yet the character of Jesus Christ stands alone upon the records of time. It has no analogy in nature, no parallel in history. There is nothing like it, neither in heaven above nor on the earth beneath. All else has been reviled; there is nothing, even in religion, however sacred, that has not been desecrated, contaminated, by the unholy lips of man, except one thing, and that is the character of Jesus. There is where their hearts fail. And how was it in the case of these people of Nazareth, indeed, of all Palestine? Jesus had been born and reared among them; for thirty-three years He had never been out of their sight. They had watched Him, cross-questioned Him, looked into every detail of His personal and private life. And at the end He utters to them the challenge: "Which of you convinceth Me of sin?" He never said a word that He had occasion to alter or repeal; He never did an act which He regretted; He never failed in a single trait of character. Unaccepted by His countrymen was His challenge; and so it is to this very day. Attempts have been made time and again to bring His character down to the level of ordinary men and to show that this Sun had at least a few spots. Perhaps the most famous are the attempts made during the last century by a few German and French scholars, Strauss and Renan, who wrote books which created a great stir at the time. But it was soon found how utterly threadbare and hollow those fallacious presentations of Christ were, and the writers only brought disgrace upon themselves. No, unimpeachable and immaculate stands forth the person of Jesus Christ; no one has ever been able truthfully to pick a flaw in it.

But whence, we ask, has this Man such a wonderful character? Once again, another feature to which these startled people of Nazareth give utterance. They were astonished as much at His

works as at His words, or even more. And His works were truly astonishing. He healed the sick, He cleansed the lepers, He cast out devils, He gave speech to the dumb, He gave sight to the blind, He gave life to the dead. Never man did things like this Man. And the mightiest works of Christ are not those which He did during the two or three years of His public ministry. The mightiest works of Christ are those which He continues to-day in our own midst. It was a great thing to give sight to the blind; it is a greater thing to open a man's eyes to see his sinfulness and the beauty of holiness. It was a great thing to make the lame to walk; it is a greater thing to make the morally lame to run in the ways of God's commandments. It was a great thing to heal the leper; it is a greater thing to cleanse a man from the hideous leprosy of lust and sins. It was a great thing to bring Lazarus from the grave, but it is a greater thing to quicken men who are dead in trespasses and sins into spiritual life. Look at the works of Jesus Christ to-day — His Church. And every one that is a true member of it, is a subject of Christ's wonder-working power.

2.

Dear hearers, we have recalled to our minds, from a mere human standpoint, who and what Christ was, and the more one gazes upon this "Carpenter's Son," the more does He loom up amid the ages as the most sublime and unique personage that ever walked the earth in flesh and blood. The great Napoleon, after having run his wonderful career and learned how to measure men, said: "I know men, and I tell you that Jesus Christ was not a man." What, then, was He? There is but one way of accounting for His wisdom, His character, His miraculous works, and that is by accepting the verdict of the Church throughout the centuries as expressed in its Creed, that in Jesus Christ we have the only-begotten Son of God, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God. That explains everything, and it is the only thing that explains it. Is that your opinion? The question repeats itself with tremendous emphasis: "What think ye of Christ?" What is your attitude towards Him? Do we implicitly believe His teachings, accept them as divine truths? And not only that; there is another phase to religion besides the theoretical, doctrinal side, which is, to have correct views as to the godship of Christ. There are many topics regarding which it makes little difference whether you have any thoughts on them or not — whether Christopher Columbus actually discovered America, whether Shakespeare wrote

the products attributed to him, etc. These and similar historical and literary subjects may occupy the minds of some, but their settlement one way or another has no bearing upon our temporal or eternal interests. I can do my life's work successfully and die happily even if I have never heard of a Socrates and a Seneca, or any other of the great moralists of the past. However, that is not the case with "this Man," as the Jews style Him. Our knowledge of Him, our attitude toward Him, affects our temporal and eternal interests, and without Him you cannot act your part aright in life nor close your eyes happily in death. Plenty of people there are who can glibly recite the words of the Catechism on the Lord's Day: "I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, even as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true." And yet, practically, inwardly, as far as penetrating their souls and swaying their lives and controlling their actions is concerned, it is of little or no concern to them. If that is all that the instructions of this divine Teacher effect, perhaps it were better they had never received them; for it makes their responsibility only the greater. It was not thus that Paul was affected when he was on the road to Damascus; the Carpenter's Son was a reality to Him, and he cried out: "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" And he afterwards wrote: "For me to live is Christ." If Christ is what we have shown Him to be, if His utterances are divine wisdom, then only one course is open for us. His teachings must be the foundation of our belief, the supreme law of our life. Then we ought to find our supreme happiness in learning of Him, in listening to His gracious messages, and in seeking to exemplify His teachings in living with and for Him, else all this confessing of Him is mockery and hypocritical inconsistency.

And, as we heard, was He not the performer of mighty works, the mightiest of which was that, by reason of His being God and man in one person, He was able to, and did, redeem our fallen and sinful race and became our Savior? What, therefore, is your attitude toward Him in this respect? Is He *your* Savior? To

whom do you look for safety amid the spiritual wreckage that has broken down our relation between God and man? Is it your conviction: "Neither is there any other name under heaven given among men whereby we," *I*, "must be saved"? Here is the core of the matter. It may sound pleasant enough to hear Jesus Christ of Nazareth spoken of in terms of highest eulogy, lauded to the skies as the greatest philanthropist, the wisest of moralists, the sublimest flower of humanity, and the like. They once buried our Lord in a rocky tomb. In our day they bury Him in a flowery one; but for all of that it amounts to little or nothing, unless we accept Him into our souls as that for which He came into this world, namely, to be our Savior, to save His people from their sins, to open the way of approach to the kingdom above. Is He that to you? Your honest, heartfelt confession, is it this: "I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death"? Then have you right thoughts of Him, then you are standing in the right relation to Him and He to you.

May that conviction grow in you with the growing years! May Christ Jesus, by the power of His Spirit, become more and more of a reality to us and in us. Then, when the question is asked, "What think ye of Christ?" the answer will be, in words, in character, and in deeds; He is my Teacher, He is my Exemplar, He is my Redeemer, He is my Joy and Hope and All in All, my Lord and my God. Amen.

Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity.

Ye are the salt of the earth; but if the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing but to be cast out and to be trodden under foot of men. — *Matt. 5, 13.*

The Lord has graciously instituted in this world a great household, or kingdom, generally called the Church. To this great household, or kingdom, belong all who believe in Him and are loyal to Him, and who are renewed by His sanctifying Spirit. When we study this divine institution, we find that it has a twofold function to fulfil, one in respect to itself, internal, another in respect to the world, external. Its primary function is internal, that of self-

conservation and self-culture, taking care of its own members, teaching, training, strengthening them till the Lord receives them home to Himself. In this sense we speak of the Church as the asylum into which the sin-weary and guilt-laden retreat, such as the paralytic in the Gospel-lesson for to-day, hear the gracious word: "Thy sins are forgiven thee." It is the nursery where feeble faith is nourished; the sanitarium where spiritual diseases are healed. We speak of it as the gymnasium where the Christian faculties are exercised and developed; also as the travelers' inn, or hospice, where he gathers supply and rest till he appears before God in Zion.

All this the Church is to the Christian. But besides and beyond this the Christian Commonwealth has a very important office in regard to those that are without. It not only is to foster and educate its own members, but it is God's messenger in the world to spread abroad the knowledge of His truth, to witness for Him, to act as the conscience of the world, its conqueror and example, to *be* good and to *do* good. It was with this thought in mind that our Savior pronounced the words of our text; speaking to His disciples, He said: "Ye are the salt of the earth."

We are all acquainted with the nature, the properties, and the use of salt. The use of salt is to preserve from putrefaction and decay; for this reason an all-wise Creator has distributed it so profusely everywhere throughout land and sea. And just that is the office and nature of Christians as salt — the Christians preserve the world from corruption, from total putrefaction and decay. It has always been so. In the Old World, before the Flood, when all flesh had corrupted its way, one grain of salt, in the person of Noah, preserved it from ruin for a period of one hundred and twenty years. When "the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah was great and their sin very grievous," one grain of salt, in the person of Lot, preserved it for a time, and ten such grains would have preserved it to this day. When, in the days of Elijah, Israel had sunk into idolatry, those seven thousand who had not bent their knees before Baal were the salt of that nation. And to-day the great antiseptic, the preservative, nay, the great restorative at this period, when the world so much needs restoration, what is it? The salt of God's grace and religion exemplified in His Christians.

We know there are plenty, and to spare, who have no use for the Church, who despise all this "humdrum business" about Sacraments and services and faith, and they would be pleased to have

the whole thing out of the way; and yet, but for these institutions, the people that go there and then go forth as salt from them, there would be no check to corruption, no effective hindrance to the growth of lawlessness and disorder, no holding back of having hell in both worlds. Things are bad enough as they are; were it not for Christ and His Church, the most prosperous communities would have long ago been ended in violence and ruin. The breakwater against impending judgments, the props of society, the salt, are the Christians in this world. So says Christ; so it is. And now let us

1. *Look at the manner in which Christians may act as salt,* and
2. *Ask ourselves with what propriety it may be said of us: "Ye are the salt of the earth."*

1.

One way in which Christians exert their quality as salt is the power of a holy life. We are all so connected with one another in human society that an influence is being exerted by each individual. No one lives to himself, entirely alone. Bonds of relationship in family and business and position so link us to one another that none can be without some effect upon others; and in proportion as that influence is saturated and seasoned by Christian principle, our influence answers the requirement of the text. Nor are we left in doubt as to what enters into a holy life. The apostle in to-day's Epistle-lesson mentions several items which it behooves us carefully to consider: "Wherefore, putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor; for we are members one of another." Truthfulness in all circumstances and in all forms is a virtue of salt. Without truthfulness there can be no basis of order among moral beings, no possibility of happiness; for, as the apostle says: "We are members one of another." The body social is dependent on the veracity of those who constitute that body. And yet, it is a virtue that goes begging; not only in the days when the apostle penned that line, but also after Christianity has been acting upon public feeling for many centuries. A bold, well-defined lie may be frowned down upon in respectable society; yet who knows not of the exaggerations, the misrepresentations, and the deceptions that society is full of? We have the political, the business, the newspaper, the occasional, or necessity lie, lies of all sorts and kinds. David tells us: "All men are liars." What he said thousands are ready to affirm after deliberate consideration.

There is nothing more common than temptations to falsehood, and Christians are to be on their guard against such. A great gift is the power of speech. Words are little things, but they are vested with a mighty consequence. Fitly spoken, how good they are! But if evil, what deadly poison! Watch the doors of your lips; do not bring reflection upon the religion you profess by transgressing the simplest commandment "not deceitfully to belie, betray, slander, nor defame your neighbor," but let your word be as good as your certified bond. Be truthful, and thus be "salt," after the manner of that grand old Christian church father Athanasius, whose motto was: If the world goes against the truth, then Athanasius goes against the world. Truthfulness is the first element of a holy, influential life.

Again we read in to-day's Epistle-lesson: "Be angry and sin not." Anger, a high-strung temper, a revengeful wrath, a retaliating spirit, these are the most common manifestations of the old Adam, our carnal nature, even as it is one of the signs of having put on the new man, which is created in righteousness and true holiness, if we control that temper, if we bring it into subjection lest it hurt the religion we profess. It does not commend our faith for a person to remark: My wife or husband is a member of the church, yet I find him or her just as irritable, inflammable, and as resentful as myself. In the passage immediately preceding the text, in which our Lord mentions a few qualities that go to make Christians "salt," He says in particular: "Blessed are the meek." There are plenty of occasions in a world of vice and ungodliness, oppression and injustice, to show just anger, but to flare up where no offense was intended, on the slightest or no provocation, simply to give vent to our ill will or ill feelings, supposedly slighted or hurt, does not commend our faith in Him who was "meek and lowly" in heart, and who, reviled, reviled not again. The Bible elsewhere speaks of meekness as being an ornament of a holy life both before God and in the sight of men. Exercise it, beloved fellow-Christians, for the sake of your religion, for the sake of Christ.

Again, continues the apostle: "Let him that stole, steal no more, but rather let him labor, working with his hands, that he may have to give to him that needeth." Strange exhortation, yet not superfluous then nor now. The more one gets acquainted with the inner workings of things, the more is he satisfied to stay unacquainted. Cheating, dishonesty, trickery, overreaching,

abounds in all departments and dealings of man with man. One objection at times heard against our Christian religion is: I have had dealings with some of your church-members, and I found them just as ready to take advantage in a transaction and as short of the principles of common honesty as those who make no such pretensions. It requires no great knowledge of human nature to see that, where there are such suspicions, men cannot easily be persuaded to embrace a system of religion that, to them, seems to produce such fruit. A Christian, to be salt, must be *honest* and honorable in all his transactions, guided not only by the civil law, which may at times permit advantages to be taken, but governed by the Moral Law; he must do to others as he wishes that they should do to him.

Again: "Be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." We may call these the winning graces of religion; they exert a most wonderful drawing influence. A Christian will endeavor to be kindly and courteous in all his dealings, a gentleman, a gentlewoman, in the truest, richest sense of the word. It does not commend our faith for sisters and brothers and relatives to be indulging in, and fostering, petty contradictions, jarring domestic differences. Moreover, a Christian will enter with real interest and sympathy into the feelings of those with whom he is brought into contact, rejoicing with them that do rejoice and weeping with them that weep. He is not selfish, thinking only of himself and moving in his own narrow sphere, unheedful of the sorrows and experiences of others. And he will be forgiving, not holding malice, waiting only for a chance to strike or pay back in one's own coin. It is not thus that Christ's cause is promoted, souls won for His kingdom.

2.

Having considered to some extent in what manner we are "salt," let us ask with what propriety that designation may be applied to us. "But if the salt have lost its savor, it is good for nothing but to be cast out and be trodden under foot of men." That may be the case with pure salt, such as is obtained from our mines, but the salt of Palestine, especially the kind used at the Savior's time, procured from the Salt — or Dead — Sea, being mixed with vegetable matter and other impurities, lost its savor when exposed, and when such was the case, it became perfectly worthless, good for nothing, fit only to be trodden under foot

of men. And that should apply to Christians? Beloved, what are you doing to purify the world? Is it the better for your living in it? Are you conscious of ever having realized your true position in the world? You are a parent, your children never see you take your Bible or a Christian paper to read, never see you fold your hands, at table or otherwise, never hear you speak a word on the subject of religion, except perhaps to criticize, never hear you planning as to what to do and what to give for the cause of Christ and Christian charity, but only for things that concern your personal, material welfare. Do you suppose so little or no salt in the home is going to win and keep them for Christ? Or let us step out of the home; if you are seen in the company of fashion and frivolity, whirling in the dance, rattling the dice, bending over the card table with the children of this world, think you that is Christian "saltiness," calculated to win them to your religion? Or if on the Lord's day, instead of engaging in the exercise of faith and devotion, you are found violating the Third Commandment in order that your interests may be promoted, your sense of amusement and recreation ministered to, what think you of yourselves when weighed in the balance of our text? What force and effect it must have upon those whose eye is constantly upon you, and who form their decision of the reality and excellency of religion from what they saw it to be in you!

Such, dear hearers, is your responsibility. Bear in mind, you are not living for yourselves only, but for souls around you, for Christ, for eternity. There is nothing more embarrassing and mortifying, nothing hinders a congregation's life and reputation more than to have men point their fingers at this one and that and tauntingly to inquire: Are those the kind of people your church consists of? How such block up the avenues of men's hearts! On the other hand, let a church be made up of men and women who are earnestly striving, even though in weakness, to be exemplary followers of Christ, gracing the doctrines preached with a godly, sober, and righteous life, and the blessings of the Most High will rest upon it.

Hewn out of the great Salt Rock, Christ Jesus, seasoned with His Gospel, saturated with the teachings and principles of His holy Christian Church, let us look well to ourselves. The Lord forgive us our delinquencies and aid us in realizing fully what we ought to be to the glory of His great name and the salvation of souls and in exerting ourselves to reach this goal! Amen.

Reformation Festival.

He feedeth on ashes. — *Is. 44, 20.*

The chapter from which the text is taken is occupied with a contrast between the idolatry of the heathen and the worship which the Israelites rendered to the true and living God. The prophet Isaiah points out the absurdity of idolatry and draws a graphic picture of a worshiper who had made himself a god out of the selfsame block which had provided him with a fire to cook his evening meal. But the leading idea of the passage is the unsatisfactoriness of idolatry, its utter inability of meeting the desires and of satisfying the cravings of the human heart. It is with such, the text declares, as with a man who feeds on ashes, which possess no strength and no nutritious substance. And in this comparison there lies for us deep instruction. We are inclined when we think of idolatry to relegate it to the domains of ignorance and barbarism, to distant Hindustan and Africa, and to picture to ourselves some degraded worshiper as he bows down before stock and stone or does homage to some four-footed beast. As to idolatry's exercising influence over an enlightened and cultured mind, this seems to us contemptible. In reality, however, and in truth it is not as we are inclined to think.

The greatest intellects have bowed down with sincere prostration before the graven image. The most cultured nations of antiquity, the Greeks, the Romans, the Egyptians, and the Babylonians, have been remarkable for their idolatrous zeal. And the very people who were set apart for the purpose of protesting against the evil and overthrowing it were incessantly turning aside after idols, and it was only after long and painful discipline that they were purged of their hankering for other gods. And why is this? Idolatry has exercised such sway, the prophet tells us, because of its pretensions to meet the requirements, and to satisfy the needs, of the human heart. A religion of some kind man will have. God has not left Himself without a witness in us all. Engraved on the tablet of man's heart, be it ever so dim, there is a something which makes him feel that he must have a worship of some kind. This craving, idolatry professes to supply. But it only offers a substitute for that which is really required. What, according to the text, the man wanted was bread; what he got was ashes. In other words, religiously expressed, he accepted something which stays the pangs of spiritual appetite for a time, but in the end leaves the soul as unsatisfied and as uneasy and restless as it was before.

Now, what has been said about idolatry in general may be said with equal, if not greater, force about the Roman Catholic Church. It is the fashion with some to make little of Roman Catholicism. They tell you it can never get a real hold upon our enlightened and thinking age. There may be one here and another there, they say, who is influenced by remarkable circumstances or by a peculiar temperament to fall a prey to its insidious charms; but the vast mass of people will ever remain untouched by what is so apparently a corrupt form of Christianity. Facts, however, are not altogether in harmony with this. The errors of Romanism have been exposed a thousand times, that Church, one would think, ought to be thoroughly known by this time and thoroughly distrusted; and yet, in spite of all that has been done, we see in the bosom of that Church not only the unthinking multitude, but some of the finest intellects, men and women whose high standing and sterling character are unquestioned in the community. And if we ask, "Why is this?" the answer is that of the text. They have been deceived, bewitched, by an enticing sorcery. They wanted bread, satisfaction for their spiritual cravings, and she is persuading them to feed upon ashes. The subject of our Reformation discourse, therefore, shall be: —

The Great Deception Practised by Roman Catholicism.

Let me show you

1. *That it professes to give bread, but substitutes the false for the true, the shadow for the substance.*
2. *How we may escape such deception.*

1.

One of the great spiritual wants about which men become concerned as soon as they have escaped from utter carelessness and indifference about their souls is the question: "Have we been forgiven or not? Are we still exposed to the consequences of our sins, or have they been in deed and in truth laid upon the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world?" Scripture meets this need of the human heart. It gives us the satisfying Bread. It tells us that, when the Lord Jesus Christ was living and ministering and doing good upon earth, a sinner anxious about his sins and burdened with them could come into that divine Presence and receive from His lips the blessed assurance: "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee." It tells us furthermore that, when the Savior left this earth and ascended up into heaven, it was not long before He sent down another divine Presence, God the Holy Ghost, to

take His place in the Church and to continue the work which He had Himself begun. Acting through the instrumentality of His Word and His blessed Sacraments, He conveys the assurance of pardon; He whispers the words: "Son, daughter, thy sins be forgiven thee." "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God." This is the Scriptural statement; this is the substance, the Bread that meets the demand of the human heart.

Now, what are the ashes that Rome presents? They are this: She tells her followers that, when Christ ascended up to the right hand of the Majesty on high, He left on earth a visible order of men, a constantly supplied succession of priests, to take Christ's place. Coming to them, and only by coming to them, can you receive the satisfaction of your spiritual desires, and when you have your absolution pronounced by the mouth of a priest, acting in his official capacity, you may be as certain, she tells you, that this sentence is ratified in the courts of heaven as if you had heard it uttered by the lips of Christ Himself.

Again, there is a natural shrinking in us from the immediate presence of a holy God. We feel as Israel did when Jehovah came down amidst the clouds and darkness of Mount Sinai, and they saw the blaze of the unearthly fire and heard the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; they begged that Moses would stand between them and God. We, too, have a similar desire. To us, as sinners, the divine presence is so terrible that we look for a mediator, one who feels for us, sympathizes with us, stands between us, and still has power with God. We have such a one. "There is one God and one Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus." Now, what does Rome do? She sets up, in effect, the Virgin Mary to be the tender human friend, the sympathizing mediator, who touches us on one side, and who, on the other side, has influence enough through her relation to her Son to prevail in the counsels of God, and through her, the blessed Virgin, she bids us approach the dread and awful Majesty of Heaven. And what is this? It is a counterfeit of the truth; it is a fabrication of man; it is a great injustice done to the character, person, and work of Jesus Christ. It is an offering of ashes in place of the spiritual bread. The truth taught in Scripture is this, that in Christ Jesus we have precisely what we want and all that we want. No supplement or addition is required. The words He spoke on a certain occasion apply here: "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" And we speak the same.

Again, we crave for certainty. Thoughtful minds desire something positive, the broad, open, unclouded light of unquestionable truth in doctrine and in practise; and God has given us such a Volume of Truth. "To the Law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them." "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path." But that Volume must be studied. "Prove all things," is the direction, *i. e.*, by the Word of God — all things, all ministers, all teaching, all preaching, all worships, all opinions, all practises. Measure all by the measure of the Bible. Compare all with the standard of the Bible. Weigh everything in the balances of the Bible. That which can abide the test of the Bible, receive, hold, believe, and obey. That which cannot abide the test of the Bible, reject, refuse, repudiate, and cast away. This is our right, our necessity and our duty. And here Rome steps in and would relieve us of our anxiety and responsibility. The Church, which in its final interpretation means the Pope, will do the thinking and deciding for us; we need but trust to his judgment, which is infallible, and he will guide us both as to what to believe and what to do. He is a safe pilot. For certainty and real assurance for the conscience and all spiritual concerns look to that teacher in the Vatican. "Ashes for bread," shadow for substance! Follow that infallibility, and you will soon be bending your knees before graven images, praying to departed saints, receiving the Lord's Supper in mutilated form, saving your pennies for purgatory, and reciting your services in Latin.

And again, we long for unity. We are sick at soul when we behold the differences and dissensions among the followers of Christ. Look at your Protestantism with its hundred and one different factions and names, each fighting and quarreling with the other; altar set up against altar, ministry against ministry. And Rome offers us unity. See what a harmonious, solidified body we are, of all nations and tongues and peoples under one acknowledged visible Head. That sounds fine.

When we look into the matter, it is "ashes for bread"; it is a delusion like all the rest. It is not unity, but merely an outward uniformity, an error-bound, tyrannical church system. The history of the Roman Catholic Church has been full of dissensions, quarrels, fighting between rival Popes, between rival orders of monks, and between her theologians, converts, and synods. There exist no less than three hundred different opinions in the Roman Catholic

Church. But it is true, there sits at Rome the absolute dictator, who possesses the final word, who sways the rod of supreme authority from which there is no appeal, and against which every protest is hushed. But if that is their boasted unity, we would have none of it. It is sham and tyranny. And thus we might continue to stir up the dry ashes of Romanism until it fills our nostrils and checks our breath, rather, saddens our hearts and fills us with righteous indignation and pity for those who would satisfy the cravings of their souls with such worthless and unsatisfying supply.

2.

And how can we safeguard ourselves against such deceptions? Three particulars I would mention: Let us arm ourselves with a thorough knowledge of the Word of God. The Bible is the sword of the Spirit; the Bible is the true lantern for this our earthly pilgrimage. Let us never lay aside that sword. Let us beware of traveling without its light.

History abundantly proves that ignorance of its texts is the root of all error; that degeneracy, perversions, and defections set in when that Holy Volume is neglected. In a hurrying age like ours it is to be feared that many of our Christians do not give it the consideration its contents deserve and demand, and the consequence is that they are easily tossed to and fro by, and carried about with, every wind of doctrine and fall an easy prey to the first clever teachers who try to influence their minds. Of course, there is no royal road to Bible knowledge, not less than there is to other knowledge. Without diligence and pains no one ever became "mighty in the Scriptures." But of one thing you may be certain, that no labor will be so richly repaid as regular daily study of God's Word, familiarity with that Book of all books. Here rested the strength of that man whose name we mention with such great reverence on this day. It was that Book which made Luther free and led him into the light and liberty of Christ; by that sword of the Spirit he went forth and cut off the cords of ignorance and spiritual bondage by which Christendom everywhere was then bound and gave them also the same freedom which God's Word had given him. Against papal anathema, against imperial ban, against fires of persecution, against priestcraft, superstition, Mariolatry, relic worship, celibacy, auricular confession, and all sorts of heresy and perversion, this was the one mighty agency. May that simple Word of God also be our trust; let us store our

minds with its texts, give undivided attention to its contents. Here lies our safety.

Again, let us make ourselves well acquainted with the history of the Lutheran Reformation. Many of us have a most inadequate notion of the amount of debt we owe to our Reformer. They have no distinct conception of the state of darkness and superstition prior to the Lutheran Reformation and of the blessings innumerable and incalculable which it brought and which they are now enjoying. The consequence is that they are not as careful and appreciative and as loyal as they ought to be. They may even be inclined to criticize and find fault with our Church for making so much ado once a year about an event that occurred more than four hundred years ago. It is just this sort of apathy that Rome likes. Hundreds are led astray every year by popery or infidelity from sheer want of reading and information. Permit the scenes of the Reformation to pass before your mind's eye in sermons and in literature, the mighty achievements of the men whom God employed to set free His Church from the most insidious and destructive type of religion posing under the guise of Christianity. Read at this time especially the biography of the Reformer, and it will fill you with a righteous and godly hatred against what is so ungodly and would deprive our Savior of His rights and the honor and glory due Him. That is the last and, withal, the most important safeguard. Let us arm ourselves with clear, sound views of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and the salvation that is in Him. Let us build ourselves deep down on the strong foundation of His finished work upon the cross. Let us settle it firmly in our minds that Christ Jesus has done everything needful to our salvation, that believing in Him we are completely justified in the sight of God and can add nothing to that complete justification by any performances, fastings, prayers, almsdeeds, or anything else of our own. Once let the Lord Jesus have His rightful place in our hearts, and all other things in religion will soon fall into their right place. At the city of Worms, in the market-place of which stands a group of colossal bronze figures, Luther is represented with the open Bible in his hand, and his face upturned to heaven — the noblest artistic impersonation of moral grandeur in the world. As we gaze in spirit upon that august figure, let us unite in praising God this day for the Reformation, and let all who bear the Protestant name be true to the Christianity for which he so valiantly contended. Amen.

Twenty-First Sunday after Trinity.

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches: To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it. — *Rev. 2, 17.*

Some fifty or sixty years after our Lord's ascension to heaven His Church had been planted in different parts of the world, also in Asia Minor, in the cities of Ephesus and Smyrna, Pergamos and Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. On the island of Patmos, whither he had been exiled by the Roman Emperor, the Savior had given to His Apostle St. John a series of wonderful revelations, which He commissioned him to write down in this book of the Bible, called the Apocalypse, or Book of Revelation, introducing it with seven letters, addressed to the seven churches just mentioned: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, and the rest. Marvelous and instructive these letters are. The ancient churches, like the churches of the present day, were not perfect. The Christians who composed them are called saints, *i. e.*, holy ones, but they were saints undergoing a course of education and development. Many of them had come from heathendom, and they could not all at once forget their heathenish practises. They were cruelly persecuted and did not always find it easy to be patient under severe trials. Some, alas! had grown careless and indifferent, and it was necessary to administer to them sharp rebuke. They all needed counsel, encouragement, and exhortation, and so the Savior, in a vision, appeared to His apostle on that lonely island of Patmos and directed him to send a message to each of the seven churches separately, and to each message were added the solemn words: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

These are the opening lines of our text. Let us spend a few moments with them before developing the meaning of the whole verse. "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith." Accordingly, though the Spirit of God speaks, yet, if there is not the hearing ear, we shall not understand. When our Lord gave utterance to His beautiful parables, there were many upon whom they were utterly lost; as He Himself said: "Hearing, they shall not understand; and seeing, they shall not perceive." The truth is that in spiritual as well as in temporal matters people may have eyes and ears without making use of them. The most enchanting music may be played, the grandest tones of the organ may peal

forth in rapturous strains, they scarcely care to hear, and if the instrument were out of tune, they would be as much pleased as if it were perfect in all its parts. They possess not the discriminating ear. Discord is to them almost the same as harmony. So in spiritual matters. It is only he that has an ear who hears what the Spirit says to the churches and to him personally. Take our assembly in this place. The Gospel is proclaimed in the hearing of all, and the Spirit's power accompanies the preaching of the Word. Are all affected by that preaching in the same manner? Some listen with eager delight and go away edified and refreshed. Their hearts burn within them when they hear the expositions of the Word, of a Savior's love, of a Spirit's pleading, of eternal life and Christian duty. Others are indifferent to the most tender appeals; the most terrible denunciations affect them not. Why? Why has the Spirit's voice little or no charm for them? The answer is simple. There are other voices to which they listen more intently. What voices? The voices that are calling outside. To youth these may be different than to those of advanced years; but they are not the still, small voice of the Spirit of God. It may be the voice of pleasure or of business, of selfishness, vanity, pride, unforgiveness, and if these earthly sounds prevail, how can you listen to the heavenly? In our homes we have clocks that strike the hour. Busy with our household duties or otherwise engaged, we do not always hear them strike. And it is because men are so constantly engrossed in the affairs of this world, their thoughts so much and unduly occupied with the things of time, that they hear not the voice of the Spirit of God. That voice is indeed always striking upon the ears of mankind, but for many it strikes in vain. Therefore, when entering this holy place, present yourselves before God in a listening attitude, learn to conform to the pious old custom: Bow your heads in prayer, while your hearts utter a devout: "Speak Lord, for Thy servant heareth"; then blessing will rest upon what the Spirit says in and to the churches.

And now let us hear what Jesus, speaking through the Spirit, says in our text. Variously, under a number of figures, the Christian life is represented to us in Scripture. No figure is more frequently expressed than that of a warfare, a struggle, a conflict, a keen, hotly contested fight. Nor can we do better for the strengthening of our faith than to ask ourselves a few questions as to this warfare and then note the gracious and glorious reward that connects with it.

1.

To begin with, it is not mere hazy speaking nor only figurative, metaphorical language when we speak of Christian life as a conflict, a warfare. Christianity, if it is genuine and true, does not mean to be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease, but as the sacred poet says: "Sure I must fight if I would reign; increase my courage, Lord." It requires all the vigor and valor of which by divine grace we are capable. And with whom must we fight? Who are the enemies in this warfare? They are three in number. Says the apostle in to-day's Epistle-lesson: "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." Rebels cast down from heaven, with damnation branded upon their brow, they have plied their malignant operations against mankind from the beginning. Starting with our first parents in Paradise, they have tyrannized over their posterity, not even desisting from assaulting the very Son of God. There be many indeed in these days who disavow and sneer at the existence of such enemies, but that only shows their chief, called Satan or the devil, has deluded men's minds and by his cunning craftiness overcomes them. The truth is that this universe of ours is spread out before him like a vast checker-board; there is not a square of it which his eye has not surveyed; there is not an hour or moment when he ceases to ply his hellish assaults. Amid the noise and bustle of the street, amid the retirement and silence of the chamber, by day or by night, he tries to shake our faith and bring us to fall. However mysterious are his assaults, there is no end to his devices. He has a snare for every age, a pitfall for every circumstance, a trap for every place. Sometimes as a roaring lion, at other times he meets you as an angel of light, and he can lead you on as he did Eve, little by little, step by step, so gently and softly that, unless you guard against his wiles, he will take you unawares. It is not empty verbiage what you just sang: —

Watch against the devil's snares
Lest asleep he find thee;
For, indeed, no pains he spares
To deceive and blind thee;
Satan's prey Oft are they
Who are soundly sleeping
And no good watch keeping.

Nor is he alone; he has a powerful ally — the world.

With forbidden pleasures
Would this vain world charm
And its sordid treasures
Spread to work us harm.

It radiates its sweet smiles, which to many prove irresistible, and promises honors, which to many are so fascinating and alluring; or she changes her face, putting on frowns and sneers, to many so unbearable, particularly to young Christians. Watch, and remember, the world must be resisted, battled with, and overcome.

> Is this vile world a friend to grace,
> To help us on to God?

Verily not!

And a third enemy there is, the old man, the inbred corruption of our nature, that deceitful and desperately wicked heart, a great measure of which still remains even in those who are God's children. It is the traitor within the camp, ever ready to betray the citadel and open its gates to the foe, than whom there is none more dangerous, and against whom we must cultivate an ever watchful frame of mind. Oh, the significance of these words: "Watch against thyself, my soul, lest pride and sin, that lurk within, all our hopes do scatter!" Such are the enemies in this warfare, formidable, unrelenting.

And how shall we fight against them? Note that wonderful array of weapons St. Paul mentions in to-day's Epistle-lesson, the 6th chapter of Ephesians, and as you read this passage, practise a little self-examination whether you have put on the different parts of the "whole armor of God." There is the girdle of truth, *i. e.*, sincerity, whether you are really an upright, out-and-out Christian, or whether it is only hypocrisy, a putting on of appearances. For if the girdle, or belt, which holds all together, is missing, the rest will fall to pieces at the first assault of the foe. Then there is the breastplate of righteousness, holiness, that you do right, that you be honest in your dealings with your fellow-men, truthful in your assertions, doing that which is reputable and honorable in the sight of God and man; for how can dishonesty, lying, and fraudulent dealing keep one's heart safe against the assaults of his spiritual enemies? Whosoever yields to these things is bound to sink down in defeat. "And let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." Alas for any man, no matter who he be or what he be, or what he has been, who barters with the enemy! He is no match for him. And the greater the height, the deeper the fall.

Next in the spiritual armor are the sandals, or boots, for the feet: "your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace." One reason why some fall out of the ranks of Christian soldiery is that they never use their feet and their hands, neither time nor

means, in the service of Christ. They never do, help, work, sacrifice, endure for Christ and His religion. A religiousness of that type soon becomes flabby and a prey to one's spiritual enemies.

"Above all taking the shield of faith." With the darts of the Wicked One flying about us, his fiery, poisonous arrows leveled against our heads and our hearts, — doubt, unbelief, sensuality, dishonesty, intemperance, despair of God's mercy, — who can tell all the hellish arrows he seeks to lodge deep in these poor souls of ours? And the only thing that will protect us from these missiles [of Satan] is to throw up the shield of faith. Would to God that Eve had put up that implement of protection in the Garden of Eden! Then the history of our race would have been different from what it now is. Would that David had employed it when walking on the housetop of his royal palace in Jerusalem! Would to God a Peter had handled it more dexterously! Then he would not have denied his Master so shamefully. An indispensable safeguard in Christian warfare is the shield of faith, and to use it after the manner of a Joseph, who, when tempted, exclaimed, putting up this shield: "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?"

"And the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God." The Bible, its texts and instructions, is the two-edged blade of which we can say what David said of the sword of Goliath: "There is none like that." To have it with us and to handle it well is to be master of the field. It was this weapon that Jesus drew against the Tempter and discomfited him. It was this weapon that Paul drew and brought the world to the feet of the Crucified One; it was this weapon that Luther drew, and a new era dawned in the Church. And the same mighty weapon is ours with which to do and prevail. Let us grasp it firmly, keep it well sharpened and polished, *i. e.,* let us become intelligent, informed, and familiar with our Bible, and we are equipped through God for the pulling down of the devil's stronghold.

And then there is one thing more without which all the rest were useless and ineffectual. "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit." The Christian warrior's life must be pervaded by the spirit of prayer. Prayer is power, communion with God, inspiration, and strength; where that declines or ceases, the inner life declines and ceases. Such is the complete armor of the militant Christian.

Have we to fight this warfare alone, or are there any allies and comrades? Allies? "The angel of the Lord encampeth round

about them that fear Him, and delivereth them." Not a solitary angel, but an angelic chieftain with his legions of holy and powerful spirits; for "are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" See them leading Lot and his family forth from Sodom. See them with flashing cavalry and flaming artillery, covering all the mountain round about Elisha and delivering a whole army into the hands of a single man. If one of their number could slay all the first-born of Egypt in a night and stiffen in death 185,000 Assyrians with a blast of his breath, what have we to fear? Wherever a demon lurks, a holy angel watches and walks with us. Nightly as we recline upon our pillows, the Catechism directs us to speak: "Let Thy holy angel be with me that the wicked Foe may have no power over me." Yes, powerful allies and comrades. Adam, the first man; Abel, the first martyr; Enoch, the first prophet; Noah, the fearless preacher; Abraham, the father of the faithful; Jacob, Job, Moses, Joshua, Gideon, Samuel, David, — all these of the Old Testament, and in the New Testament the glorious company of the apostles and the noble army of martyrs, in a campaign of well-nigh six thousand years, have fought and prevailed against the host of evil spirits, being aided by the ministering spirits of God.

And how long will this conflict last?

Fight on, my soul, till death
Shall bring thee to thy God.

All your life this warfare must be carried on, from the time when the sign of the cross was made upon the forehead and the heart in token that you were enlisted under the banner of Christ, and that you will not be ashamed to confess the cause of Christ Crucified and manfully fight under His banner against sin, the world, and the devil. The battle never ends this side of the grave. The scenes will be constantly changing and the character of the fight, but there is no discharge of the soldiers until the great discharge of death. And what then? Then the reward.

2.

What is the reward promised those who faithfully fight? "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna and will give him a white stone and in the stone a new name written which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it."

To understand what is meant by the hidden manna, we must call to mind the miraculous food with which the Israelites were provided during their forty years' sojourn in the wilderness. "This

is the bread," said Moses to them, "which the Lord hath given you to eat." Now, this miraculous bread, a full allowance of which was sent the Israelites day by day, is a prefigurative representation of Christ. "I," said the Savior, "am the Bread of Life." I will feed you with spiritual nourishment and strength during your earthly pilgrimage and warfare, not openly, visibly, indeed, like the Israelites, who saw the manna, but hidden in *this* life, for I am here invisible to you; but hereafter I shall not be hidden, but you shall see Me as I am, and then you shall be blessed with the full enjoyment of Myself to all eternity.

"And a white stone." Reference is here made to a custom which prevailed in ancient countries. When a person underwent his trial, the judges gave their verdict by casting a black stone into an urn, if they condemned him, or a white one if they acquitted him. The pronoun "I" therefore signifies that, when the believer shall stand before the judgment-seat of Christ, he shall not be condemned with the wicked, but be acquitted, declared free from all guilt, in the presence of his accuser, Satan.

"And in the stone a new name written." Allusion is here made to another ancient custom. It was usual for kings and princes to change the names of those who held office under them. Thus Pharaoh changed the name of Joseph when he set him over his house. Nebuchadnezzar changed the names of the three Hebrew youths in the Babylonian captivity. Hence, the new name which Jesus promises to give His victorious servants implies that He will receive them into His family, His holy household, and confer upon them all the privileges and dignities of heaven. And when our Lord adds in the text: "Which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it," He wishes to say that none but the believer himself will be able to understand and appreciate the blessed experience, the transcendent delight which will thrill the recesses of his soul, when he shall be advanced to share in all the honors and happiness which are the portion of Christ's people.

Such is the reward. How the prospect of it ought to animate us to persevere in the arduous, but good and glorious conflict, to which our great Captain summons us!

Let's, then, wrestle, fight, and pray,
The battle ne'er give o'er,
Renew it boldly every day,
And help divine implore.

Happy, thrice happy and honored, is he who overcometh! Amen.

Twenty-Second Sunday after Trinity.

If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.
Rom. 12, 18.

If a person reading our Bible in some distant sphere, if, for instance, some other planet of the universe were inhabited and some there were to form an idea of the state of the Christian world, he would draw in his fancy the fairest picture of a happy society, he would expect to meet with nothing but concord, harmony, and order, the voice of clamor and contention forever silent. But were such a person from afar to come among us, how universally, alas! would he be disappointed, when in the actual conduct of Christians he discovered so little correspondence with the mild and peaceful spirit of their religion; when he would see the fierce spirit of contention and bloody warfare now raging unrestrained on the European Continent and everywhere would witness society embittered and disordered with quarrels and dissensions.

Turning to the Bible, the God whom we worship is known by the title of "The God of Peace." Even before Christ came into the world as our Savior, He was called the Prince of Peace. The blessings which were proclaimed at His birth were: "Peace on earth, good will toward men." The whole of His life was one continued exemplification of it. The Holy Ghost is called the Spirit of Peace. Among His fruits are expressly denominated, meekness, gentleness, and long-suffering. Now, what shall we think of those who make so little of this virtue, who occasion such scenes of turmoil, enmity, and strife? Justly do they invite the criticism that they have no real claim upon the sacred name which they profess, seeing their conduct so openly contradicts it; they belie their religion. In order that such reproach may not pertain to us, let us set ourselves to consider sincerely, as suggested by our text, the importance and the advantages of living peaceably with all men. We shall learn —

1. What is included in this precept; 2. Why we ought to observe it.

God bless His Word!

1.

A first glance at this striking text shows us that its requirement is not absolute, but conditional — "if it is possible." It points out to us an ideal which we are constantly to keep before us, though the apostle admits its perfect attainment is not always possible. Living, as we do, in an evil world, coming, as we do, in contact with evil men and evil things, there must be collision

and conflict. How was it with the Prince of Peace, our blessed Lord, Himself? It was simply impossible for Him to be at peace with the Pharisees, for example. He felt bound to expose their hypocrisy and lay bare their evil motives, rebuking them with words which stung them to the quick, and so aroused their hatred that nothing short of His crucifixion would content them.

How was it with His apostles, the very man, for instance, who wrote this line, St. Paul? When, in obedience to their Master's command, the apostles went forth preaching the Word, they were persecuted in every city they entered, reviled as disturbers of the peace, as men who turned the world upside down. Was it different, as we had occasion to hear a few Sundays ago, with the Reformer? Or is it different with a faithful preacher at the present day? Let him arouse men's consciences, point out something they are guilty of, and he will find it quite impossible to live peaceably with all men. Yes, how is it with a Christian in general? There are occasions when there is one thing for him to do, to resist evil. Submission is not always right. His honor and good name may compel him to fight in the courts and in public print. And in social life there are some natures so crooked, so obstinate and perverse, that it is out of the question to maintain principle and character and yet keep on good terms with them. There are people who would fall out with an angel from heaven, and when the hearts of such are once unfavorably set, one might as well try to turn a river over the mountain top, as to bring them to pleasantness and good will. They will cut, sting, and stab whenever and wherever they find opportunity. Sorrow even and death do not seem to modify their ill affection and ugly temper. Such unreasonable people were found in the days of the apostles, and their kind has not died out in our time.

We must never forget that there is one thing higher than peace, that is truth. In order to have peace, we must not sacrifice principle and truth. There is such a thing as false peace, which does not stand for Christianity, but cowardice and insincerity. Our Lord might have left the Pharisees alone, foreseeing, as He did, what would result from interference. But He was not content to have peace at any price.

Asked why he publicly attacked the Pope and others and did not keep peace himself, Luther answered: "When sin is so notorious and is gaining ground everywhere and is doing public harm, as is the case with the doctrine of the Pope, then one dare no longer

be silent, but must resist and rebuke." According to the Scriptures, the Spirit of God is first the Spirit of Truth, then He is the Spirit of Peace. He is first the Teacher, He is next the Comforter. And so a Christian is first a man of truth, in his faith and in his principles, and ready as a good soldier of Jesus Christ to fight for them, and then he is a man of peace. This, then, is the qualification, the condition, which the apostle attached when he penned these words: "If it be possible." The presence of evil may make it impossible. Yet, he is particular to note that the fault (to come to the second clause) must not rest elsewhere. Where? In one's own temper and spirit. That clause reads: "As much as lieth in you," with due emphasis upon the words "as much," "as much as lieth in you," not everything and always, as we heard.

It is not always due to circumstances and other people's meanness, as well as to our need of asserting our rights and standing up for the truth that we lack peace; the fault lies in a much closer vicinity, in us. And the intent of the apostle was to acquaint us a little more closely how far this is so. When does the fault lie in us?

My beloved, there are, as you study God's Word and your own hearts, three great peace-breakers in this world, *i. e.,* three sinful passions, or desires, that dwell in every human heart and make for discord and unsettlement of peace. The first is selfishness. A selfish person can never be a peaceful person. He knows only one, that is himself. He provides for, looks to, the supply and satisfaction of himself only, and that constantly and entirely, no matter who is made to suffer, or who is shoved into the background, or what disquiet is caused, just so his object is gratified and his ambition attained.

The second peace-breaker or passion to unsettle peace, is revenge, retaliation. Let a person's dignity have been wounded, or supposed to have been wounded, his path crossed; let him be offended or think he has been offended, and oh, how quickly and uncompromisingly this passion will flare up in his breast! What schemes he will devise to pay back in the offender's own coin, to "get even"! The darkest pages of the history of the world and of individuals everywhere prove that.

And the third peace-breaker is envy. Proof? See those hostile armies laying waste the earth with desolation and bloodshed. What was the cause but envy? And so when this passion, this green-eyed monster, as it has been styled, reigns, within the breast, when we

are filled, as we all are by nature, with malignant discontent and begrudge one another's good fortune, worldly prosperity, personal attraction, intellectual endowments, or the position he or she occupies in society, or the influence some one exercises, there is a disposition to quarrel, to make it exceedingly unpleasant for the other.

These, then, are the great peace-breakers that lie within us.

And when may these unholy, peace-disturbing passions be subdued and man's heart inclined to harmony and good will? Here rests the root of the matter. When that heart has undergone a change; when it itself has found peace. The apostle addressed this exhortation to Christians, those who had made peace with God, through Jesus Christ, their Lord, and in whom dwelt the Spirit of God, who is a Spirit of peace. They are the persons who are inclined to peace, who have the power to keep peace; for they possess the three great peace-makers, the opposites of those three peace-breakers. Which are they?

In the first place, love, love to God and man, and love seeketh not her own. Love is not selfish, but self-sacrificing, careful to avoid giving provocation or offense, ready to bear and forbear.

In the second place, humility. This is one of the first graces which the grace of God inspires in a Christian's heart. When we know ourselves as we are and see ourselves in the light of God, we drop our overweening selfishness and do not begrudge and envy a brother who is superior and more successful.

And the third is the opposite of a retaliating disposition, namely, a forgiving spirit. You have heard the Gospel-lesson for to-day. We have expounded it time and again on former occasions, the parable of the unmerciful servant, who owed his lord ten thousand talents and received remittance, and because so much had been forgiven him, the king expected him to treat his fellow-debtors likewise. The application is for us, and if we are true disciples of Him who spoke this parable, we shall conform to its lesson. Realizing how much the Lord in His mercy forgives us, we shall not take our fellow-debtors by the throat and say, "Pay me that thou owest," but, conscious how little we deserve forgiveness, make allowance for the offenses of others, quench the feeling of an ugly, crabbed nature to burst out in revenge and curb and resist it. And who, harboring such sentiments, does not perceive that we have the most powerful means to live peaceably with all men? A Christian seeks to live in peace with every one; he desires to be the friend of everybody and to have everybody as his friend.

2.

What remains, indeed, for us is to cultivate these peace-makers, these noble, God-honoring, Christlike virtues. The apostle says we should do so to all men, live peaceably with all men. Time forbidding a more exhaustive treatment, we shall restrict the application to two spheres, to the home and to the Church. A few words of direct application as to these. The home is the chief training-ground, where the graces of the Holy Spirit, gentleness, goodness, patience, and meekness, are to be fostered and developed. A Christian is most a Christian in his own home; there he appears in his worst or his best; for there he casts aside all reserve and insincerity, shows his true nature, and exerts the most indelible and lasting influence. Is it superfluous, then, to state that some people, and among them professing church people, would be so much better if they set themselves to cultivate a little more of the peace-making spirit, cheerfulness, and even mirth?

While we all agree as to the sinfulness of lying, drinking, and cursing, do we sufficiently recognize that ill temper, suspicion, instability, and the like are sinful too? And yet, is it not these dispositions that cause the angels' song, proclaiming peace and good will, to be drowned by the sounds of strife and ill will and the face of your Savior to be saddened? Be on your guard, therefore, against sarcastic words, which sting and wound, provoking retaliation and ill feeling. Keep yourselves free from small acts of selfishness by which you interfere with the comfort of others, in order that your wishes may be carried out. Drive out, with God's help, the spirit of suspicion, which makes you imagine a bad motive where there is none, and leads you to treat with distrust those who love you well. Beware of instability, which is ready to take offense at a word and is easily provoked and always thinks evil. And if you have been hurt or offended or wronged, then, for Christ's sake, forgive as you would be forgiven. Say not that you have a "temper." This may be true. But it is not a good symptom to plead it. Lay it down as a fixed principle that there is no temper which the grace of God is unable to subdue. It is sufficient for everything. As there is no sin of which the guilt is so heinous as to be beyond the atoning power of the blood of Christ, so there is no evil propensity, no lust, and no passion which is beyond the subduing power of the Spirit of Christ. With His aid you can, you will overcome it. Peace, let it reign in our homes. Let us avoid the peace-breakers!

And peace in the Church; the apostle, you may see from his writings, was ever concerned about that. We can well understand. There is no place where the devil so loves to sow the seeds of discord, agitation, and strife as in the congregation of God. But we must not permit him to succeed, but resist him. Endeavor, seek, to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. How? By cultivating the virtues that make for peace: humility, love of the brethren, and a forgiving spirit. Nothing is more ruinous to the Church's quiet than a selfish, uplifted, pretentious, and vainglorious spirit in its members. The continual finding of fault, dwelling upon what does not please us, and refusing to pass by the little causes of irritation and annoyance that are bound to be where man deals with man, is not a thing befitting Christians, nor is it promotive of good fellowship. Hence the apostle exhorts us to suppress such feelings, to bear one another and be forbearing, as love and charity dictate and demand and as becomes those who are members of the same family and household in religion.

As to the blessedness of such conduct, just a word. Such a one is thrice blessed. In the first place, he is blessed himself. To be free from that irritable and quarrelsome spirit, which turns the happiest circumstances and relations of life into wormwood and gall, to keep aloof from those disputes and wranglings with others, which spoil the joys and sour the lives of all concerned, is to be blessed. But he will be blessed also by others. From the quarrelsome and rude all men naturally recoil, and they avoid their company. A person of peace is loved by his associates. Above all, however, such a one is blessed by God. In his heart, by faith in the Prince of Peace, which has been wrought in him by the Spirit of Peace, dwells God, and where God dwells, there is blessedness.

Let us, then, strive to be true children of the God of peace in the midst of this world of strife, until we shall enter at last into the City of Peace and there forever and undisturbed serve the King of Peace. Amen.

Twenty-Third Sunday after Trinity.

But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly; wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He hath prepared for them a city. — *Heb. 11, 16.*

One of the most active and powerful impulses in the human breast is the desire for something better, some superior situation, some more favorable lot, than is at any time one's portion on earth.

We see this desire manifesting itself on all sides and in various kinds of ways. For what does the laborer and tradesman toil? For what does the professional man practise? For what do the statesmen contend? It requires no prophet to read the handwriting so legibly written over all the face of human society. It is this impulse that carried a Columbus across the trackless deep, against opposition, difficulties, and hazards; it was this impulse that nerved the emigrants from Germania's plains and Britain's isle to clamor to our rugged shores and plant themselves in the wilds of primitive America. Wide-spread is the aspiration, the yearning, for a more favored place, for something better.

And this earthly longing is a dim foreshadowing of the longing for the hereafter. When the drama of life is ended and death knocks at the door, it is to that better country that Faith and Hope look forward with eager, anxious eyes. It was so, our text tells us, with the ancient patriarchs. Of Abraham it says: "He looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." Isaac and Jacob likewise, "having seen the promises afar off, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth"; having no permanent home, but waiting and looking for one to come. And such is exactly the attitude and condition of Christians even at this day. St. Paul's declaration is that our country is in heaven, and everywhere do God's holy revelations speak of our obtaining this sublime inheritance and portion. Let us, then,

1. *Regard some of the characteristics of this "heavenly country,"* as it is called in our text; and
2. *Observe what is necessary to its securement.*

1.

The apostle, comparing the next world with this one, says that it is a much better country. It is so *as a place.* There is much in this world that is very beautiful and magnificent. When God had finished the work of creation, when the glory of the last touch of His hand was upon it, we are told He looked at it and pronounced it "very good." To have gazed upon it before sin marred its beauty must, methinks, have stopped the angels in their flight and filled them with speechless admiration. Even now, ruined and destroyed though it be, there are many spots where the eye is gladdened and the heart entranced with visions of beauty which words cannot express. Who, as he has gazed on some glorious

landscape, where hill and dale and forest unite to form one ravishing picture, or as he has passed through some quiet valley, made fragrant with the perfume of flowers and vocal with the ripplings of the streamlet and the songs of birds, has not been impelled to lift up his thoughts in adoration and to say with the psalmist: "Marvelous are Thy works, O God! In wisdom hast Thou made them all." When Dr. Luther gazed upon the scenery about the Wartburg, we are told that he was so overwhelmed by its grandeur and so carried away by the singing of birds that he said: "Lord, if Thou hast provided such beauty and such music for sinners on earth, what hast Thou in store for Thy saints in heaven?" Yes, though sin has given this earth the thorn and the thistle, the hurricane and the blight, though it is but a desert compared with what it once was, "when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy," yet there are to be found many scenes of wondrous beauty even here.

But lovely and sublime though this earth may be, it is not to be compared for a moment with the world above. When we remember that heaven is the metropolis of the universe, the palace of the King of kings, where God's creating power and skill have found their highest expression, a place which He has expressly prepared for those who love Him, then we cannot but conclude that heaven will be more glorious than all that we have ever seen or imagined. It enters not into mortal mind to conceive the rapture of that place; faint as an infant's lispings is all that human speech can tell.

> Jerusalem, the golden,
> With milk and honey blest!
> Beneath thy contemplation
> Sink heart and voice oppressed.
> I know not, oh, I know not,
> What joys await us there,
> What radiancy of glory,
> What bliss beyond compare.

As a place it is a better country.

Again, we need but think of our *bodily existence*. The body which we possess now is not best suited to our happiness. How liable to disease and death! How small a thing, the heat of the day or the chill of the night, the venomed sting of an insect, may stop its working altogether, or bring to us the most grievous afflictions! To what temptations is it exposed, to what sufferings liable! And who can feel the infirmities of age coming on without longing

for some tabernacle more ethereal and strong in which our spirit might dwell? And need I say that such a body will be ours hereafter — a glorified body, a body like unto Christ's body, which will know no fatigue in its labors and be subjected to no hurtful influences from the elements, where there shall be "no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away"? What a glorious prospect not to be burdened with toil or harassed by sickness or racked by pain! When that Savior shall come in the glory of His Father and the holy angels with Him, then your vile body shall be raised incorruptible, and you shall be changed; those furrows shall be wiped from your brow and those scars from your frame; no more will you have to grieve over this tenement of clay and say, "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak," but with every feature gloriously fashioned and every faculty perfect, you shall walk the courts of bliss forever. It will be a better country.

Again, heaven will be a better country if you look at the *society we shall find there.* Much of our present happiness, undoubtedly, springs from society. It was not intended by God that we should live in isolation from our fellows, that we should shut ourselves up in monasteries and convents, as though we could serve God better there. No greater delusion than that was ever cherished. As instinctively as the lark rises toward the sun, as inevitably as rivers run toward the sea, do we seek the society of our kind. But there are many drawbacks to the pleasure and profitableness of society here. We are often compelled by circumstances to associate with those whom we do not like, and we are often prevented from associating with those with whom we would be pleased to associate. Our friends are taken from us by death when, probably, we most delight in them. Discords and jars come between us and those whom we esteem. In short, a thousand things operate and cause a terrible deduction from that happiness which is to be derived from association with others. But it will be different hereafter. There we shall be with all the great and the good of every age, with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, with Peter, Paul, and John, and with every saint of God. Parents who guided our infant steps and taught our lips to pray; life's companions, by whose bedside we stood, and whose parting glance sank into our souls with an impression never to be effaced; children around whom the tendons of our hearts were most strongly entwined, — these shall meet us on the eternal shore. Angels, who rejoiced over our

conversion, who guided us in evil and protected us from danger, shall be there and introduce us to all the wonders and beauties of heaven. And above all, we shall there meet One who is the center of that radiant society; not as He was on earth,

> A silent Lamb before His foes,
> A weary Man and full of woes,

but with the glory of God encircling His brow and the diadem of the universe at His feet. We shall see Him; we shall speak to Him, and He will speak to us, and we shall enjoy fellowship heart to heart, soul to soul, with Him. Oh, for the rapture, the concord, the perfect fellowship of that radiant society! No hypocrites, no traitors, no cunning dissemblers there; no false dealings, no misunderstandings and disagreements, no rivalries and factions. The members of that blessed realm shall feel alike, think alike, love alike. All happy in their Lord, they shall all be happy in each other. Yes,

> There is a happy land,
> Far, far away,
> Where saints in glory stand
> Bright, bright as day.

Again, it will be a better country with respect to its *employment.* Contemplate this world. Observe the activity that everywhere goes on: a hurrying to and fro upon the streets, its noise and rattle by day, which scarcely subsides during the small hours of night. And what does it all mean? It is the battle for life, the struggle for subsistence and bread, the desire of the anxious head and the laboring limb to secure a comfortable livelihood and, perchance, to lay up a little for a rainy day and an honorable burial. It will not be so in that "better country." There will be no question about what we shall eat, what we shall drink, and wherewithal we shall be clothed. The worry to keep the wolf from the door will be ended forever. Toil will be pleasure, and anxieties will be exchanged for everlasting joys.

And yet it will be activity. Heaven is not a place or condition of mere indolence, of idle and inglorious ease, as some may conceive of it. 'Tis true, when the children of God depart this life, we speak of them as being at rest. We inscribe it upon their caskets. It is not unscriptural. All who have gone hence in the Lord do rest from their labors and have entered upon a Sabbath that will never end. But a misconception mingles with the sweet thought. To sit on clouds or, as Mohammed conceived, to luxuriate in the idle bliss of an eternal dreamer on silken couches, surrounded by

the perfumes of lilies and roses, is not the destiny of the redeemed. Physically and spiritually he is not a healthy man who does nothing. But what can the saints in heaven do? They cannot relieve the distressed; there are no distressed. Nor will they be under any necessity to work for their daily bread. What, then, will they do? I do not know; but from the fact that inaction is misery, I am free to say that God provides something for us to do hereafter. Occupation suited to every variety of taste, talent, and capacity, adapted to every stage of knowledge and power will be there. The angels are not idle, why should the saints in heaven be inactive? No, they shall serve God night and day. Not a day of conscientious study for Christ's sake has been spent in vain; not a habit of industry or self-denial for Christ's sake has been acquired in vain; nor will the cultured intellect of the earnest-hearted be left unemployed. Depend upon it, we shall all yet do that noble work for which we have been fitted and prepared upon earth. The man who was faithful over much shall be faithful over much there; and he who was faithful over very little shall have authority over ten cities. It will be a scene of great and joyous activity.

Such, then, — time fails us to mention other characteristics, — is that "better country."

2.

This leads us to the other thought, intimately connected with this evening's topic, namely, How shall we reach that "better country"?

To desire it will not take us to heaven any more than the wish for a million dollars will secure us that sum. There must be preparation for heaven in order to enter it. It is a somewhat forceful, but excellent illustration which tells us that formerly, when it was customary to have fools and jesters for the amusement of princes and nobles at court, a certain king gave his fool a stick with the words: "Whenever you find a greater fool than yourself, give him this stick." Years passed by, and the king fell mortally ill. His court fool came to see him, carrying his stick. The sick monarch told the fool that he would soon leave him. The fool asked, "Where are you going?" "Into another world," answered the king. "When are you coming back? After a month?" "No." "Within a year?" "No." "When then?" "Never!" "And with what have you provided yourself for your long journey and your stay at the place to which you are going?" "With nothing!" "Is that possible?" cried the fool; "you are about to go away on

a long journey, and you made no preparations whatever and took no thought about how you can live happily in the other world from which you will never return? Here, take my stick; for I have never been guilty of such folly. You are a greater fool than I am." Forceful, yet undeniable. Of how many such fools the world is full who never once think of preparing for the heavenly land! It must be clear to every man of common understanding and common reflection that, to be partakers of the heavenly kingdom, we must possess such qualifications as shall render us, in the language of the Bible, "meet to be partakers." What is that meetness, that preparedness? "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ." Since our infant lips could lisp, we have been saying it: —

> Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness
> My beauty are, my glorious dress.
> Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed,
> With joy shall I lift up my head.

The only way to the kingdom of heaven lies through the close and intimate and personal union, by faith, with that blessed Redeemer who has declared: "No man cometh unto the Father but by Me." There are some who would tell you that everybody, all, thieves, drunkards, adulterers, vagabonds, will ultimately go to heaven. Delusion and silly prattle, stamping God's Word a lie. God in His Word says that some will not enter heaven. "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven." "Be not deceived," writes St. Paul; "neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners shall inherit the kingdom of God," Does this look as if everybody would get into heaven? Before you can be approved by the Holy Being, you must be sanctified. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Without holiness no man shall see the Lord. You must not only be in Christ, but Christ must be in you.

It is related of a pious old man that he was asked whether he ever expected to go to heaven. "Why," was his reply, "man, I live there." Like that old saint we must have our heart in heaven; and I fear, if we do not get to heaven before we die, we shall never get there at all. "Seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth." Christ

never framed into words a greater truth than when He said: "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Where is your treasure, where your heart, dear hearers? Let us diligently seek those things which are above. Let our feet and hands, our conduct, be directed thither; and when life's short day is over, then it will be ours to enter upon those blessed scenes which eyes have not seen, ears have not heard, and which have not yet entered into the human heart to conceive, in that better country which we desire, which we call *heaven*. Amen.

Thanksgiving Day.

Be glad, then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord, your God; for He hath given you the former rain moderately, and He will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain and the latter rain in the first month. And the floors shall be full of wheat, and the fats shall overflow with wine and oil. . . . And ye shall eat in plenty and be satisfied and praise the name of the Lord, your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you. — *Joel 2, 23. 24. 26.*

We are assembled in God's house on our national Thanksgiving Day to offer an annual tribute of praise and thanksgiving to the great and blessed God. Very meet and right is it so to do. National blessings call for national gratitude. Mercies publicly bestowed demand a public acknowledgment. Accordingly, though the invitation is issued by civil authorities, which in matters of religion are not our lords and masters, it is nevertheless one of those acts which cannot fail to commend themselves to the favor and conscience of all true Christians, and therefore they cheerfully flock to the house of God on this day and sing the praises of Him who satisfies the desires of every living thing. We, too, would join our voices with all the godly in the land in a general offering of gratitude. Nor is there a way of more properly leading our meditation into the right channel, and setting before you more fully the obligations to adore and magnify the great and benevolent Author of all our privileges, than by enlarging upon the manifold blessings He has again vouchsafed unto us.

1.

In the first place, we would note that the ingathering of the harvest-fields demands thanksgiving. God's promise has not failed. Each year reerects, as it were, Noah's altar in our midst and repeats to each generation the promise of God's unfailing and unalterable

word when He said: "While the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, shall not cease." God's goodness went out with the sower as he laid down the precious seed in the bosom of mother earth. God's goodness went out with the hoarfrost as He scattered His protecting snowflakes over the tender plant. God's goodness went out with the summer sun as it came back from the Equator in the South and looked upon our smiling fields in the North. God's goodness drew clouds when the sun's rays grew hot and the growing grain languished, and He sent down gracious rain from heaven in due season. And so, God's goodness, having watched, protected, and matured the seed, went out with the husbandmen and the reapers as they gathered in the sheaves. "The floors are full of wheat." It is sufficient to say that the harvest has equaled, yea, excelled, the hopes of the sower. We have not only sufficient for our own necessities, but abundance to pour out for the wants of sufferers in less favored portions of the world. Golden harvests waved from Maine to Florida, from New York to California, over all the boundless grain-fields of our broad valleys; from the slopes of the Atlantic to the coast of the Pacific the reapers have been calling to each other in gladness of heart. The orchards, too, have borne plentifully. And now, while the reaper puts aside the sickle and he that binds up the sheaves rests from his toil, reflecting on the bountiful provision made for man and beast, and how graciously the country has been spared from destructive elements, there is a call unto us from the field and the granary that we should lift up our hearts and voices in grateful and devout acknowledgment; for, as the text states, "the Lord, your God, hath dealt wondrously with you."

Nor has only agricultural and horticultural prosperity been our portion. God's goodness has gone forth with our industry and enterprise under all its forms. We have had a year of fair business activity. In a time of commercial pressure, due to lack of material and other conditions, the after-effects of the crisis we passed through two years before, the sagacity and forecast of our merchants and bankers has saved them from any general disaster. Manufacturers have met with royal returns. The whirring noise of machinery, the shriek of engines, the fires of furnaces and forges, the hum of factories, is lively going on, furnishing employment to the men of brawny muscles and supplying their families with bread.

Another reason for thanksgiving. During the course of these months we have also been favored with great healthfulness throughout all the land. No epidemic has invaded or ravaged our shores. As we think of the pestilence which walked mysteriously among us two years ago in such frightful virulence, striking down its victims on the right hand and on the left, spreading desolation and grief, and which made its appearance again last year, though in milder form, we cannot adequately thank God that all His winds as they swept over our States have been loaded by Him with salubriousness, that no line of quarantine had to be erected, no plague came nigh to our dwelling, that the good gift of bodily vigor has been bestowed upon our nation from ocean to ocean. Among the gifts included in our daily bread, Luther, in the explanation of the Fourth Petition, mentions also good health.

Again, we are called upon to render thanks to the Author and Giver of every good gift for the fact that our country has enjoyed peace and freedom and their happy fruits. Peace and freedom are among the choicest blessings which Heaven can bestow upon a nation. Alas! who justly appreciates them until they are gone? Without them, small is the enjoyment of any other blessing. That we are living in an eventful period of the world I need not tell you. Our age is an age of tribulation for a great part of the earth. We have seen a war of uncommon terror, sent forth to ravish the most civilized portions of the globe. It has fed upon everything great and sacred. And there are vast communities which are being deluded and oppressed since by the cupidity and ambition of wicked leaders. Melancholy, too, in the course of this tumultuous period, has been the fate of that people with whom the most of us are connected by family lineage. That once great and splendid nation is still bleeding profusely from the wounds sustained in that sanguinary conflict. Heartrending are the reports reaching us from those parts. But while we thus think of the calamities and the strife and confusion under which some of the nations of the earth are suffering, in Russia, in Germany, in Ireland, in Poland, it ought to increase our gratitude for the peace and civil privileges which we are permitted to enjoy. Anarchy and dissension dare not as much as be whispered among us. Our citizenship, as never before, in this present month, has shown its interest in the affairs of national and state government. For these precious possessions, peace and freedom, the right of suffrage, these civil privileges, let us to-day devoutly thank God.

Another cause which invites our gratitude as a nation is that the means of education, schools, colleges, universities, and libraries, are fostered and extended. This is a thing of greatest importance. It is equally true that a people must be ignorant before it can be quietly enslaved, and that it must be well informed before it can enjoy freedom. Hence, under a form of government like ours the cultivation of the mind, the diffusion of knowledge and civilization is a matter of primary consequence. It therefore affords pleasure to every patriotic citizen to behold that the schools of learning are fostered in our midst, that our schools are advanced to a standard which meets the requirements of a well-informed community, and that the men entrusted with their supervision are intent on eradicating every evil which threatens to diminish their efficiency. No more prominent and beautiful structures ought our eyes to behold in our thoroughfares than the temples of learning, libraries, and professional buildings for the study of science, arts, and mechanics. The schools and other educational institutions in our city and throughout the land are multiplying, forming ornaments, but, most of all, a solid foundation for the expansion and improvement of the faculties with which man is endowed by his Creator, and which make for his welfare and comfort. This is an abundant cause for thanksgiving.

Nor, while mentioning these institutions in our survey, would we overlook the establishment and maintenance of homes for our unfortunate citizens, our public benevolent asylums, such as our capacious and splendid City Hospital, homes for the indigent, blind and demented, deaf and dumb. Let us bear in mind that all these and others are the fruits of Christianity, the noble products of the Gospel. Many a good man is overtaken in life's pilgrimage by misfortune in old age and bereft of a home and of loved ones to care for him, and it is certainly an item worthy of mention and a source of thanksgiving to God that He has in His providence, through the agency of our municipal, state, and federal government, as well as through the generosity of individuals, provided such public benefactions. It is as high a praise as can be passed upon any nation to say that it cares for those who are afflicted in body or mind, suffering or destitute. And it ought to be an occasion of gratitude to see the manifestation of such a spirit, the spirit of the Fount of our faith.

This brings us to the last and crowning blessing; for, my beloved, there is something more than the blessings of the soil,

and of the bread that feeds our body; there is something more than the blessings of health and physical vigor; there is something more than the blessings of civil liberty and security of person and substance by righteous laws; there is something more than the blessings of earthly knowledge, of mechanical and professional skill. What that is you have already answered in your own minds. God's eternity is its sphere; God's only Son its subject. Some religion every associated people on earth must possess. It is a pillar without which no civil society can stand. How happy are we in this respect! The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the choicest blessing which God has bestowed upon the inhabitants of this miserable world. It "is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path"; it is the balm of our sorrows and the staff of our hopes; as an angel from heaven, cheering us on our way, it guides us through the perplexed and thorny paths of this unsatisfactory life to a state of rest and glorious immortality. This Gospel we enjoy in its purest state. No sword of government or civil restraint interferes with its authority and free exercise. The brightest jewel in our possession is religious liberty, in consequence of which we are privileged to worship God without being interrupted and hindered, according to the dictates of our conscience and convictions. Happy, yea, happy beyond all calculation we are in this respect.

2.

Such are the blessings for which we are assembled to praise the Author and Giver of them all. Great, indeed, is the sum of them! God hath dealt wondrously with us. What return shall we make unto the Lord for His goodness? Wherewith shall we repay His love? First of all, let us attribute our blessings to the true source, the loving-kindness of our heavenly Father. On this day it behooves us to recall the meaning of the First Article, and to recite with thoughtfulness: "I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still preserves them; also clothing and shoes, meat and drink, house and home, wife and children, fields, cattle, and all my goods; that He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life; that He defends me against all danger, guards and protects me from all evil; and all this purely out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me;

for all which it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him. This is most certainly true."

Simple words, significant words, breathing the true Thanksgiving Day spirit of godliness and of acknowledgment of divine blessings received; and with it let there be contentment. After all, it is not so much the bountifulness of what is bestowed as the sense of gratitude with which one receives whatever one receives. A truly grateful heart finds some theme of praise in every hour's experience. Think only — it is 300 years ago — of the first public thanksgiving service rendered in this country, when the Pilgrim Fathers, on the bleak shores of the Atlantic, sent up their hymns and prayers of praise over a repast that consisted of a few oysters and a most scanty fare. But theirs was an appreciation of even a small bestowal of divine goodness and a heart of contentment. Oh, that throughout the land the latter-day settlers would cultivate the same noble virtue and in this respect imitate the character of those early sturdy Christian souls; for, to quote the words of the apostle, "godliness with contentment is great gain."

And again, gratitude is not found in sentiment only, but also in practise. While with decent festivity and temperate pleasure we sit down at our tables and enjoy the viands placed thereon, a Christian joy will not suffer us to be unmindful, whether to-day or at any other time, of those who are less favored. The Lord keep us from a disposition of selfishness, niggardliness, covetousness, which only receives and is reluctant to bestow; which can hear the pleas of charity with a dull ear and tightens the purse-strings with an iron clutch. There is no blessing in that; it belies the purpose of this day and the calls of our benevolent religion. While we enjoy God's bounties from our well-supplied shelves, let us think of those of less comforts and in distress. Let us not suffer an occasion like the present one to pass without the resolve to do something to make others happy. Nor let us close the day before we have rendered a sincere prayer of gratitude and praise to Him who has dealt so wondrously with us. Hallelujah! Amen.

Humiliation and Prayer Sunday.

And he that owneth the house shall come and tell the priest, saying, It seemeth to me there is as it were a plague in the house. — *Lev. 14, 35.*

A terrible scourge, a most horrible affliction was the plague of leprosy. We have had occasion time and again to describe to you how it affected the body. It was little short of a living death. It rendered its victim an object of abject abhorrence and unfit for social life; it made him an outcast. However, leprosy was a disorder that attacked not only the body. Like the dreadful disease the public prints have been so full of, cancer, which extends not only to our physical frame, but to trees and other organisms in nature, so leprosy, according to the Book of Leviticus, was frequently generated in the garments, in clothes, especially those made of wool; yes, the infection extended even to the houses, the dwelling-places, of the ancient people of God. What was the exact nature of it is somewhat difficult to determine. So much is plain, that it was a disorder which corroded the walls of the plastering and, if left undisturbed, would finally completely destroy the building. Nor was it regarded as natural, but as an extraordinary judgment sent by God because of some undetected and unacknowledged negligence or crime, as the hand of God upon such as had forgotten and disregarded His Law. And the typical significance, the spiritual meaning, of this at once suggests itself.

Leprosy, in general, is a type of sin, of that worst, disorganizing plague that has infected this world of ours, and it is everywhere, in the heart of man, in the clothes of man, *i. e.,* symbolically interpreted, in all his associations and circumstances. We can see its foul traces in our systems of government, education, business — nothing is safe from this contaminating disorder. And so it is with our houses, whether we would have that to mean the residences in which we dwell or the house in which we are met at this hour and where we are wont to perform our worship unto the Most High. Here, too, leprosy is likely to show itself. How? The working of leprosy was gradual. It was not detected all at once. It came in an insidious form. The atmosphere did not seem as pure as usual. The inmates of the house began to sicken one after another. It was manifest that there was something wrong. What is it? What can it be? Reads the text: "And he that owneth the house shall come and tell the priest, saying, It seemeth to me there is as it were a plague in the house."

Beloved members, this is with us Humiliation and Prayer Sunday. We have come to know what it means: examination, investigation, scrutiny, and searching of heart, a survey of our premises, spiritually regarded; and methinks the text chosen will aid us in that and lead us to the proper course and cure. We just heard what the owner of a house which appeared to be infected with leprosy said. He feared that there was evil somewhere, that there was mischief at work, not apparently on the surface, yet perceptibly by this and that symptom. "It seemeth to me there is as it were a plague in the house." Symptoms tell of an undercurrent, give an inkling that things are not altogether right, though the malady as yet has not broken out in disastrous shape. You desire such symptoms? As a spiritual diagnostician I shall put a few under the microscopic lens of God's Word, and my speech shall be frank and direct. Fifty and two Sundays — another year of God's grace and church life is closing to-day. Privileges and opportunities for growth in Christian knowledge, for divine worship, for soul devotion, were again furnished us in morning and evening services. What report have these fifty-two Sundays of grace to give of our congregation as a whole and of you, dear member, as an individual? How has it been with our attendance at divine services? In part, commendable and in part reprehensible; at times something to be ashamed of when you consider the number that make up this congregation, while some are hovering on the verge of Christian discipline and excommunication for their laxity and deficiency. Reads the Third Commandment of God: "Thou shalt sanctify the holy-day." And the time was, not so many years ago, when to be a professed Christian was synonymous with being a regular, consistent attendant at the house of God. Both the commandment and the pious custom seem to have been canceled from the memory and program of not a few. Months and months pass, and regularly enrolled members are absent from their pews; they are strangers to the habitation where God's honor dwelleth, and their ears are deaf to the message of the servant of the Lord, whom they profess to have called to preach to them the Word of Life. The bells ring out their charming tones, and one should think that not a soul breathing within a Christian bosom could resist their invitation. Yet I could furnish you the names not of one or two or a half dozen, but of dozens of men and women in accredited membership upon whose hearts these metallic sounds fall as upon rock; they do not appear in

response to their invitation. Were it not for the visitors and strangers, these pews, particularly in the evening, would present many deplorable gaps.

Those services particularly I cannot refrain from mentioning, because they are services when, methinks, every Christian should be found in the sanctuary paying his homage, which are especially void of the consideration they are entitled to: Thanksgiving Day, Christmas, and Good Friday. Now, what sort of a streak of spiritual leprosy does this indicate! For leprosy in the house was wont to be detected by a gray or reddish streak. We shall call it indifference, lack of Christian conscience, loss of spirituality, decline in one's sense of obligation to God, forgetting the one thing most needful. And the same (for the thing just mentioned and the one I am going to mention interlock) pertains to the Sacrament. "This do," says the Lord Jesus Christ, "as oft as ye drink it in remembrance of Me." And He says it to all who profess Him as their Lord — "as *oft* as ye drink it." In the preface of the Catechism we read these words, which are not strange to us: "If a person does not seek nor desire the Sacrament some four times a year, it is to be feared that he denies the Savior and is not a Christian." Luther, did you write idle words when you penned that statement? Weighed in that balance, examining the communicant cards of our membership, what verdict shall we render? And that in spite of admonition and reminding, until with a sad and heavy heart the card is placed to the rear and finally made to disappear. But what does that show? Spiritual leprosy, a damaging disorder.

Any other symptoms? Yes, beloved members, there are. Permit me to continue. An important, essential feature of our church life, affecting its prosperity and the kingdom of God at large, are the congregational meetings and the various societies formed for the transaction of the Lord's business and the cultivation of cordial and Christian fellowship, without which under present social conditions the work cannot progress. This passing church-year we have had some very important matters to consider, matters of discipline, measures of business. How small, in no way proportioned to our voting membership, is the attendance! Some have not been seen at the meetings for years. If this is not leprosy, what is it? Why are some of our most energetic workers beginning to withdraw, to abate in their zeal, to relax in their ardor? Does the Lord's vineyard stand less in need of workmen than before?

Has this church not the same God-appointed duties, yes, duties that are increasing with every year and with increasing membership? Why, then, this relaxing? Let it be frankly stated that, while our congregation in some respects enjoys a favorable reputation, it has fallen behind in some others. One is this: financially, in the matter of contributions. Among the churches of this city it was rated lowest, or very closely so, and it was with greatest difficulty and much effort on the part of our official board that we attained the mark we did. Beloved, while not rich, still ours is neither a poor congregation. Has the subject of Christian liberality not been sufficiently presented to you? Can it be that this feature of leprosy, niggardliness, withholding one's due and proportionate share from the Lord's treasury, is creeping in, corroding our walls, and defiling our house? Do I read this symptom aright?

Again. Blind and deaf, void of all perception, must be he or she who cannot read the signs of the times. One such outstanding sign is worldliness. Worldliness has always been noticed more or less, but I doubt whether it has ever manifested itself in the Church and sought to contaminate its members as much as at the present day. The lines between the Church and the world are being more and more obliterated. Pastors must be extremely careful how they express themselves in this respect lest they offend their fastidious hearers and they retaliate with unkind words and absence from the house of worship. The average attendant claims it to be his and her right and liberty to imitate the ways, the dress, and the habits of the corrupt and idolatrous world, to take part in its amusements, to join its societies, to form connections just as they please, and yet to claim to be very correct and orthodox Christians, yes, Christians of a superior sort, free from the bigoted and illiberal spirit of those who count such things an abomination. And so we find in the place of the old-time Christian, whose delight was in the Law of the Lord, in which he meditated day and night, and whose interest was centered in the house of his God with its sacred ordinances and exercises, in whose heart the words of his Master were ever alive: "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me," those who are just as much at home in the playhouse as in God's house, to whom worldly fashions are as interesting as the Gospel, and who are quite at peace with earthly vanity and bestow dollars on mere folly and selfishness and a little spare

change for the cause of piety and religion. Beloved, is this plague manifesting itself in the house among our young people and among those who are not so young, of whom we might expect better things? Then it is only another symptom of spiritual leprosy.

Once more, then, have I, as an observer of this house, unbosomed myself. One of the choicest virtues is loyalty. It is only a few weeks ago when thousands and thousands of our young American manhood gave the ringing note of "Loyalty to the Government!" There is also such a thing as loyalty to the Church, and a most exquisite and commendable virtue it is, loyalty to one's own particular church.

It is with deep regret that I mark the symptoms of decline in this respect. There may be proper and sound reasons that prompt a member to detach himself, but what shall we say of that type of membership which, having received a pastor's instructions and vowed allegiance at the altar on the day of confirmation, will for social reasons, because they have found friends and more congenial entertainment elsewhere, go to other and strange folds? What shall we think of that loyalty which because of a little slight, generally only supposed, or unpleasantness with a fellow-worshiper will ask for one's release? Or what shall we say of those who, when no longer residing in the immediate neighborhood, forgetful of the ties established by Providence between pastor and their fellow-worshipers, and of the blessing they might continue to be, quite selfishly and unconcernedly detach themselves? There are other species I shall refrain from mentioning lest I appear too personal. But let this suffice. Plague-spots, my beloved, in the house of our congregational life cannot fail to fill us with anxiety that there is something wrong.

Now, what is to be done?

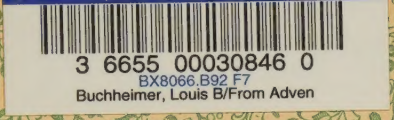
When, among the Israelites of old, a house was found to be leprous, very prompt and decisive measures were adopted. The first thing they did was to empty the house of all its contents, furniture, draperies, etc. Then the affected stones were removed and the walls scraped, and fresh stones and plastering were put in those places. The house thus dealt with was for a time left alone; if on reexamination it was discovered that the leprous symptoms were not stayed, it was completely and forever demolished. There was no further hope for it. It perished in its uncleanness. If, however, no traces were discerned, a most significant and typically beautiful ceremony took place. Two live birds were

provided, one of which the priest killed, letting the blood fall into a vessel of pure water. He then took the live bird and plunged it into the vessel of blood-stained water, and when it was crimson all over with the blood of its slain mate, he went to the open casement or door and set it at liberty, allowing it to fly away to its native woods.

Is the application of these processes referred to difficult to find? First there must be an emptying, *i. e.,* of all excuses. Have we been indifferent to the calls of God, neglectful of His messages, negligent in regard to His Sacrament, niggardly in our contributions? Has the world been too much with us and we with the world? — or whatever may be the delinquency and deficiency; every one knows best the plague of his own heart. Let us not seek to conceal it from Him whose eyes penetrate every crevice of our soul, and with whom apologies avail naught. But let us be frank and acknowledge that the spots of spiritual leprosy have been upon us.

Next, let there be a scraping of the walls of our hearts. What can that signify but sincere contrition, humiliation, repentance, that, as we sit here in God's house, we bow our souls in bitterness and sorrow and say: Lord, have mercy upon me! Forgive me my faults! Enter not into judgment with Thy servant. So much blessing, O God, on Thy part, and so much lukewarmness, ingratitude, shortcoming, and infidelity on mine. Deal not with me according to the severity of Thy judgments; suffer me not to break down the house of my privileges, and the salvation Thou hast provided for me, by my impenitence. Spare me the dreadful doom of those whose sins are uncovered, whose transgressions are not forgiven, who shall once be laid even with the ground when it comes to the final reckoning. Let there be scraping of the conscience — penitence.

And what is that service with the two birds, the one slain and the other, blood-stained, set at liberty, a significant type of? Every Christian knows that we are cleansed, that our souls are set at liberty only and solely through the blood of Him who was slain on the cross. It is He, and He alone, who could secure for us, and by His holy, precious blood and His innocent suffering and death has secured, deliverance from spiritual leprosy. Our salvation, our only hope and comfort, is in Him, through faith in His blessed merits. Amen.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